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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



January 2012
Envisioning India

Vol. 117, No. 1



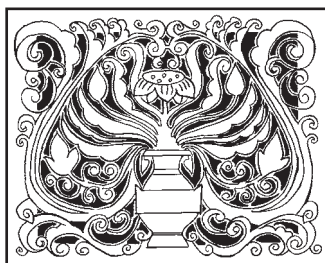
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Vol. 117, No. 1
January 2012

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The cover design is based on the Indian flag with
the *vajra*, Indra's thunderbolt,
envisioned by Sister Nivedita.

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TO OUR READERS

A HUNDRED and seventeen years! Most people might miss the significance of this small statement, but to the staff and subscribers of *Prabuddha Bharata* it is another milestone in religious journalism, of the Order's achievement, of history, and of religious literature in the making. We thank all of you—contributors, subscribers, readers, reviewers, publishers, advertisers, patrons, and well-wishers—who have been travelling along with us on this remarkable journey.

The theme for this January 2012 special issue is 'Envisioning India.' The theme is attractive not just because it is in consonance with the name of our journal *Prabuddha Bharata*, Awakened India, but because of major changes taking place all over the world. As the centre of power has been shifting since a few decades from its old domains into Asia, India's importance is fast growing in many areas. Meanwhile, the 'mild and dreamy' East is discarding its old appellation of indolence for a massive

demonstration of its potential. The results are a new awakening in India and many other Asiatic countries. Such national awakenings forge a new identity in the national consciousness, which in turn impels the nation to press forward to newer dimensions.

Each Indian may have a different idea of what India is, but in any case when we speak of today's India we do it as a part of the process of reformation and rebuilding, not as the final structure. Does this mean we keep building by adding substructures and removing old ones? It is not like that, for there is a vision for India arising above the clamour of 1.2 billion voices roaring to be heard. This vision has been given by Swami Vivekananda, who understood India's soul and its future. It is now time to stop the clamour of pushing individual visions and work towards fulfilling and materialising Swamiji's vision for a glorious India.



Birth Anniversary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda is a household name in India. He was one of the greatest spiritual leaders of the modern world. Through the lectures he delivered at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 and subsequent lecturing and teaching work for four and a half years in the USA and England, he raised the image of India to a high pedestal as the land of spirituality, harmony, and rich cultural heritage. What is now known as modern Hinduism is mostly Swamiji's creation.

Swami Vivekananda's actual 150th birth anniversary year is January 2013 to January 2014. But Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission are taking up from 2010 itself a series of service programmes as a prelude to the actual birth anniversary celebrations.

These service programmes include poverty alleviation in a few selected areas, elimination of child malnutrition in 150 selected areas all over India, education and empowerment of women, and also education for youths. For five of these projects the Government of India has given financial help but it is not enough. We need another 26 crore to sustain these projects. For this we have issued a separate appeal.

On this occasion the following projects will be undertaken for the coming three years:

- a. Publication of books, pamphlets, and souvenirs.
- b. Cultural programmes, music, and essay competitions for school children and youth.
- c. Cultural seminars and conferences, parliament of religions, and inter-religious dialogues
- d. Publicity through print and electronic media.
- e. Various spiritual programmes for general public and festivals in connection with the observance of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

For these projects we have to depend entirely on donations made by the charitable public. These donations are eligible for income tax exemption under 80G of the Income tax Act, 1961.

We earnestly appeal to our devotees, friends, supporters, and eminent citizens to contribute, according to their capacity, for the noble cause of celebrating Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary in a fitting manner. We pray that the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda be showered on you and the members of your family.

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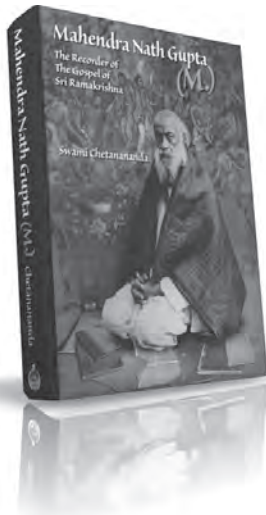


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True Sovereign

January 2012
Vol. 117, No. 1

अद्रोहस्सत्यवचनं संविभागो दमः क्षमा । प्रजनं स्वेषु दारेषु मार्दवं ह्रीरचापलम् ॥
एवं धर्मं प्रधानेष्टं मनुस्स्वायम्भुवोऽब्रवीत् । तस्मादेतत् प्रयत्नेन कौन्तेय परीपालयेत् ॥

Abstention from injury, truthfulness of speech, justice, self-restraint, forgiveness, procreating [offspring] from one's own wife, amiability, modesty, freedom from restlessness, the practice of these is the best of all religions as said by the self-created Manu himself. Therefore, O son of Kunti [Yudhishtira], do thou observe this religion with care.

(Mahabharata, 12.20.26-7)

त्यजेदेकं कुलस्यार्थं ग्रामस्यार्थं कुलं त्यजेत् ।
ग्रामं जनपदस्यार्थं आत्मार्यं पृथिवीं त्यजेत् ॥

Give up one [member] for the sake of the family, give up the family for the sake of the village, give up village for the country, and give up the world for the sake of the Atman.

(Chanakya Niti, 3.10)

आप्नोति स्वाराज्यम् । आप्नोति मनसस्पतिम् । वाक्पतिश्चक्षुष्पतिः । श्रोत्रपतिर्विज्ञानपतिः । एतत्ततो भवति । आकाशशरीरं ब्रह्म । सत्यात्म प्राणारामं मन आनन्दम् । शान्तिसमृद्धिममृतम् । इति प्राचीनयोग्योपास्व ॥

[The person of Self-knowledge] obtains sovereignty; he attains the lord of the mind; he becomes the ruler of speech, the ruler of eyes, the ruler of ears, the ruler of knowledge. Over and above all these he becomes Brahman, which is embodied in akasha, which is identified with the gross and the subtle and has truth as its real nature, which revels in the vital forces, under whose possession the mind is a source of bliss, which is enriched with peace and is immortal. Thus, O Prachinayogya, you worship.

(Taittiriya Upanishad, 1.6.2)

EDITORIAL

India Forever

WHICHEVER DIRECTION one turns in this proverbial land of contrasts and contradictions one is directly or indirectly bombarded with 'India'. Everywhere—in homes, farms, factories, schools, colleges, streets, slums, playgrounds, workplaces, corridors of power, and religious establishments—the populace is engaged with this one theme. The discussions, studies, analyses, debates, demonstrations, gossip, and the like are taking away much time, attention, and energy from concrete actions. However, all these parleys and reviews are not doing India bad, for at least people are now thinking beyond petty self-interests. The media of course is having a field day and is fuelling this conflagration. It is like a climate of fervent messianic expectation; more accurately, it is a kind of silent revolution slowly breaking forth. Such events have occurred before in a lesser degree, but the present transformation has a different character and will have far-reaching implications. The first indications are already in the air, with Indians relating their lives to national events as well as world events to national well-being or national threat. In this charged emotional atmosphere, overloaded with information, national criticism and merit are showing no signs of abating, nor are Indians being saturated with it. Given these circumstances *Prabuddha Bharata* devoted this issue exclusively to the theme of India. Through it we are not taking advantage of this 'India' fever sweeping the land but wish to envision the future more clearly, because in an intense ambience everything—good and bad, faults and

righteousness—becomes magnified and even distorted. Whatever is happening today is the manifestation of a huge movement beneath consciousness. India is growing larger and is dominating Indian minds, and in trying to understand this phenomenon the limitations of the Indian mind are diminishing.

About fifty million years ago the Indian subcontinent was violently formed from continental drift and plate tectonics. Today another form of convulsion is taking place as the idea of 'India': the seething hot mantle is forming and re-forming the crustal layers of the collective national mind above. Old values are colliding with each other and forming new ideals, and in the process India does not lose anything, it only absorbs, as it 'takes time to turn everything into bone and muscle'. A startling new consciousness is rising and the nation is being re-formed before our very eyes. The subcontinent shows signs of continuous habitation right from Palaeolithic times, and hence such upheavals must have periodically occurred. The present one, however, is powerful and is creating a new Indian psyche. Many people will say the cause is the growing economy, as if there is nothing more in India than economic development! Similarly, different sections of society will give equally different valid reasons. In any case, all reasons are manifestations of a fundamental and innate power that few people have studied or understood. Periodic upheavals have wrought superficial changes from the outside-in, where the trickle-down effect hardly reached a few

layers on the top. True, India's unique quality of adjustment absorbed all those alien changes and made them her own. This time the upheaval has been from the inside-out; the whole national soul, as it were, is churned, making the changes real and far-reaching.

Since independence ordinary Indians have been mercilessly driven by those with money and power. All these years the journey for them has been from disaster to disenchantment to disillusionment; and the greatest disappointment has been the democratically elected leaders who sordidly clung to power and compromise, leaving the nation prone. In the present silent revolution ordinary people are taking charge of their lives, their hopes, and their country. The time has arrived for Indians not to wait for doles from the government machinery, but to empower themselves and accomplish things that need to be accomplished. Politics thrives under the glare of public adulation, esteem, servile fawning, and sycophancy. Such established behaviour that Indians were good at for centuries is gradually waning. The media keeps politics in the spotlight, though it is now focussing more on its darker side.

Indians are evolving a new identity and this tremendous process of change was predicted and declared a little over a century ago by Swami Vivekananda, when he spoke of it in Madras in 1897: 'The longest night seems to be passing away, the sorest trouble seems to be coming to an end at last, the seeming corpse appears to be awaking and a voice is coming to us—away back where history and even tradition fails to peep into the gloom of the past, coming down from there, reflected as it were from peak to peak of the infinite Himalaya of knowledge, and of love, and of work, India, this motherland of ours—a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining

volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her any more; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet.'

It took a century of lumbering travel to reach this threshold, because national consciousness kept waiting, as it were, for every straggling community to be present on the track.

Religion in India has an enduring history. Pre-historic sites from the Mesolithic age reveal that, 'along with the [cave] art have come increasingly clear indications that some of the caves were sites of religious activity'. There was a lurking danger that the nation was going to forego religion and change its long cherished ideal for another. How could religion, which had nurtured the oldest civilization, comforted its race in their many trials, gave them fortitude to overcome difficulties, made them living gods, and led them to moksha, be changed for anything else in the world? History has repeatedly proved in other nations that eliminating religion destroys races and civilizations. Starting from the Upanishadic age, a period of great religious and philosophical revival, every upheaval in India always meant a religious revival through reformers who were spiritual colossuses. Even the mighty emperors who unified India in the past took the help of religious revivals or were fired by it. Swamiji is emphatic: 'Every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion.' The rest of the nation's development falls smoothly in place.

Each nation has a distinct ethos and ideal, and no society is perfect, but viewed macroscopically one is struck by the universal harmony and

resonance. The danger comes in when people make society the be-all and end-all of existence. An ideal ethos is that which leads one to immortality. In India ethos and religion and ideal have bonded over the millennia and this synthesis was in need of an adjustment, not to the times, as real ethos transcends time, but towards a higher direction, because within the last hundred years humanity has made tremendous progress and was in need of direction. As in the past, the ideal must be made universal, cutting across all different forms of ethos found in the world. And the beginning of this adjustment occurred more than a hundred years ago. The changes were not as discernible then as they are now. Swamiji tells Sister Nivedita, after she visited the aged Gopaler Ma, a great woman saint: 'This is the old India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away, never to return!'

The agency that brought about the adjustment is not only powerful but it is a divine agency. No ordinary agency could undertake the massive task of reformation, renewal, and revival without the intrinsic knowledge of the nation's soul. In other words, the task needed an avatara. Swamiji speaks stirringly of Sri Ramakrishna: 'Again and again has our country fallen into a swoon, as it were, and again and again has India's Lord, by the manifestation of Himself, revived her.' The question will naturally arise as to why India is singled out for this special treatment? The treatment is special because it has significance for souls all over the world. India is called the *karma-bhumi*, land of karma, and *punya-bhumi*, land of merit. Swamiji says: 'Formerly I thought as every Hindu thinks ... that this is the *Punya Bhumi*, the land of Karma. Today I stand here and say, with the conviction of truth, that it is so. If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come

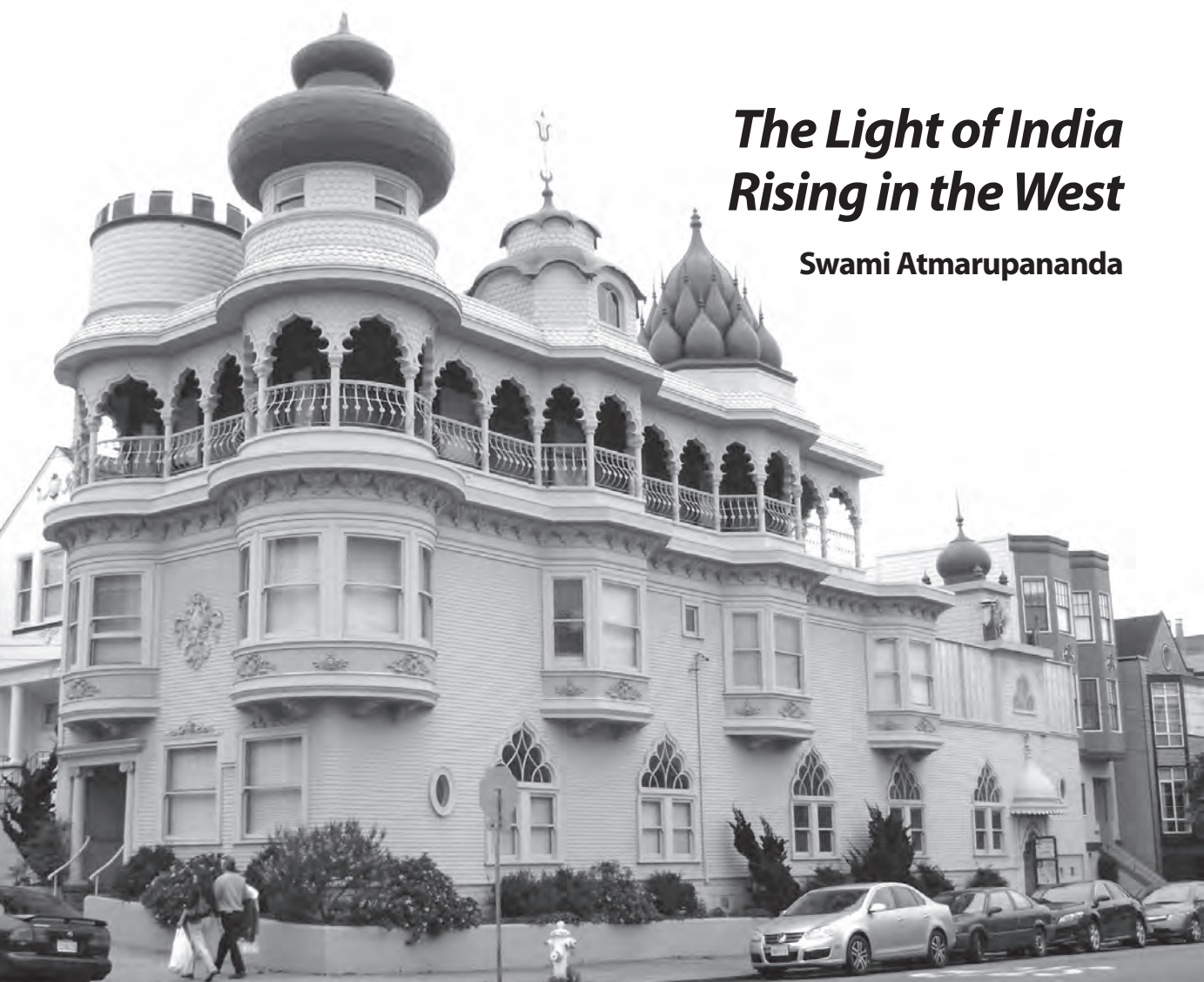
to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India.'

Religion, which was confined to monasteries, temples, and formal worship, was brought out of its old moulds by Sri Ramakrishna, who unfolded it for its wider application. The new methods, building on the old, have become dynamic and have included all human activity. Sri Ramakrishna's religion is meant for today's life and society and is in consonance with science, technology, ethics, and the new human consciousness. This religion can be practised in homes, farms, factories, schools, colleges, streets, slums, playgrounds, and workplaces, by each and every person. This religion is the deification of life and the world in every movement of life and thought. It does not require elaborate worship-materials but a change in attitude, from worldly to spiritual. This is not merely a religion of fasts, prayers, tears, and vigils, but a religion of strength, of spiritual dynamism and heroism. Such a spiritual attitude and its application will eradicate social ills, because social ills are symptoms of an underlying disease of the body politic. It is in this blessed land that one finds people saying: '*Janani janma bhumischa svargat api gariyasi*; mother and motherland are greater than heaven.' All the talk about India now has to be directed to cure the underlying disease of cowardliness, then only symptoms of corruption and the like plaguing society will disappear and each person will be empowered to be and do good. Every citizen has to plunge, like Swamiji did in India's soul, and embody her. To embody India means to embody Sri Ramakrishna, the avatara of the age, who is forever her eternal sentinel.



The Light of India Rising in the West

Swami Atmarupananda



WHEN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA came to America, India was a little known and even less understood country on the 'dark' side of the earth: shrouded in the darkness of the West's cultural self-centeredness. To many Westerners, India was a country steeped in superstition, unacquainted with the light of modern science and the miracles of modern technology. Religiously it was blind to the light of the one true religion—Christianity—in spite

of the sacrifice of so many missionaries who had gone to save the heathens there. And being blind to the one true religion, India could not but be steeped in immorality. The Ten Commandments of the Abrahamic traditions were unknown and unobserved; women fed their babies to crocodiles; Hindus sacrificed to outlandish idols that they bowed before in humble submission, unmindful of the one true God. The people lived in mud huts like primitive tribals and dressed in un-tailored clothes, the men often going half-naked. And they ate with their hands, unacquainted with the implements of civilization like forks and spoons. Such were the prevalent views of India.

Swami Atmarupananda is the manager of the Ramakrishna Monastery, Trabuco, US.

Swami Vivekananda spent his first year and a half in America explaining India to the public through his lectures and parlour talks, but more than anything, explaining India through the magnificent grandeur of his very person—Malvina Hoffman, the great American sculptress, said that the only time she had seen Swamiji, he had revealed to her more of the true spirit of India, without even uttering a word, than the many lectures on India she had attended later in life.¹

And now, one hundred years later, what a difference! Today one turns on a British or American radio and the announcer may be of Indian birth or parentage. Some TV personalities are Indians. Several CEOs of large corporations—even of Fortune 500 multinationals—are Indians. Winners of the Nobel Prize—in the physical sciences, in economics, in literature—are from India. In cities across America one can find practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine. Even in small towns one can find Indian restaurants. And everywhere in the country, in cities and towns and rural areas, one can find yoga being taught to plain, ordinary Americans with no other connection to things Indian. Children of Indian ancestry are in schools and colleges everywhere, and not just present but excelling, winning local and national academic awards. By some measurements, Hindus are the wealthiest religious group in America.²

India's Ongoing Contribution

Though Indians have done so well in America and Europe, the news presented about India itself through the Western media is largely negative and of a nature that modern Americans and Europeans—forgetting their own relatively recent history—find particularly offensive, such as casteism, abuse of women, child-labour practices, and the like. Without any context or direct, personal experience of India these sensationalized news stories are taken by most people to be the

dominant truth about Indian society. And yet the most amazing fact in all this is that many Westerners still have, in spite of an exaggerated view of Indian social problems, the idea that India is a deeply spiritual country. And it is there, I believe, that India's greatest influence will be seen by future generations: an influence that is active now but not yet visible to all, nor provable to any.

Indian science and technology have matured to the point that India is no longer repetitive and imitative of Western scientific efforts, but is making fundamental contributions. Modern Indian literature, art, music are all vital and creative, not simply repeating past glories but standing on the past and reaching into the future, making outstanding contributions. Indian commerce is so vital that some Americans are attracted to India to start new businesses rather than doing so in America.

But when future generations look back on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it will be something more profound and far more subtle—almost hidden—that they will see as India's greatest contribution, because they will see that the light of India began to shine on the very foundations of Western—and world—civilization in 1893, changing the course of history by providing a new foundation for civilization.³

What are these contributions and where are they evident to those who can see? Let us look at some of them, starting from the most obvious. Swami Vivekananda was introduced to the world at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. There his dominant message was the harmony of all religions: 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.'⁴ This was revolutionary. The followers of most religions were reluctant even to *tolerate* other religions; to be religiously liberal meant merely

to tolerate, live and let live, even if others were wrong. *Acceptance* of all religions was unheard of.

This idea is as needed now as it was in the 1890s, perhaps even more, now that all parts of the world have been brought into close proximity by modern technology. 'If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others,' said the Swami, 'I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension"' (1.24). Contrary thinking is at the root of so many conflicts in the world today. We need to learn from India the art of seeing similarity, not just difference; of seeing the universal behind the unique. We need the insight coming from Vedic times, re-envisioned by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna, that difference can only be properly understood against a background of unity. 'Our God is the one true God, all other gods are false' may be a strong rallying point for religious fanatics. But '*ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*; there is only one Reality, which is called by various names'⁵ is the greater truth that will bring people together in mutual respect and understanding.

Though, as we said, this idea was revolutionary when the swami presented it to the West in 1893, it is now becoming more widely accepted. Not universally accepted, certainly—perhaps a majority of people would still reject it. But a growing minority is open to this idea. And one comes across it in diverse places, among people everywhere—the present author has heard it often among conservative Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others, even among common people. When speaking to groups unfamiliar with Hinduism about Sri Ramakrishna's message, it is amazing to see the positive response, the relief so many people feel hearing this message of harmony and acceptance,

of respect for all religions. Swami Ashokananda once said that one of the signs of an incarnation of God is that his ideas begin to spring up of themselves, as it were, in different places in society. And this idea is one such: it can be seen springing up as though it had a life of its own.

So with the divinity of man: one can see it springing up everywhere, as if by its own inherent power, as if the time were right and circumstances propitious for it to grow. This is another pillar of Swami Vivekananda's teaching. The swami spoke from many different standpoints on many different topics, sometimes saying apparently contradictory things, as he could look at every topic from many vantage points. But consistent in all of his teaching is the emphasis on the divinity of man. What a shock it must have been to his Western audience in 1893 when he said, with a power we can only imagine: 'Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.'⁶ To people who had been told for ages that they were sinners, born in sin, powerless to escape the pervasive and filthy stain of sin without grace, these words must have been electrifying—and to some, indeed, blasphemous.

And yet now one sees this idea springing up everywhere. It still may not be the dominant idea among the religiously orthodox, but it is a growing and powerful idea that is influencing more and more people. Christian theologians like Teilhard de Chardin and Matthew Fox have sought to establish a new understanding of human nature within Christian theology, an understanding built on human goodness, on the goodness of creation, not on sinfulness. And the New Age religious movements have gone further, teaching not just the basic goodness of human nature but the divinity of human nature and of the world. Mary Baker Eddy, Ernest Holmes, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, and some of the

other founders of New Age religious thought were directly influenced by Vedanta.⁷ And in some cases the idea has sprung up seemingly of itself, as in the remarkable case of the *Course in Miracles*, a 'foundation for inner peace' that is a self-study spiritual thought system that teaches love and inner peace through forgiveness.

Like the harmony of all religions, the divinity of all beings is another idea that often finds a response of relief and of recognition when it is mentioned to audiences unfamiliar with Vedantic thought.

Strength all Over

Stemming from the swami's insistence on the divinity of man comes his emphasis on strength. This, too, was a new idea to the West. As Sister Christine said in her reminiscences of the swami: 'A sickly saint everyone understands, but who ever heard of a powerful saint? The power that emanated from this mysterious being [Swami Vivekananda] was so great that one all but shrank from it. It was overwhelming. It threatened to sweep everything before it. This one sensed even in those first unforgettable moments.'⁸ Instead of emphasizing human weakness and dependence the swami always insisted on strength and its attendant fearlessness. How much more in tune with the modern West's ethos is this idea than the idea of human weakness and sinfulness! This, the swami believed, would be the tonic that would uplift the whole of human civilization. 'Strength is the medicine for the world's disease,' the swami exclaimed. 'Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when tyrannised over by the rich. Strength is the medicine that the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned; and it is the medicine that sinners must have when tyrannised over by other sinners; and nothing gives such strength as this idea of monism.'⁹

One of the greatest gifts he gave to those

countries he visited was the image of a fully illumined soul. The West had its saints, but a saint is conceived very differently in the West. There is not the idea of a *jivan-mukta*, a transcendently free soul, identified with God even while living. A saint in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is still subject to the rules and regulations of the scriptures, still subject to the observances of sacred tradition, and in the case of Christianity, still subject to the authority of the church. In a letter to Mary Hale the swami says: 'Sister, you do not know the Sannyasin. "He stands on the head of the Vedas!" say the Vedas, because he is free from churches and sects and religions and prophets and books and all of that ilk!' (5.73).

This example of a free soul identified with God will in time give a new purpose to life in the West. Science on its own, without any religious influence, has taken away any real purpose from life. If scientific materialism is true, then life is random; and randomness is the opposite of the purposeful. Religion in the West, on the other hand, with its mythology discredited by science or its belief in a heavenly life after death too distant and unreal and unprovable for most modern people, has lost its ability to inspire a deep sense of purpose.

Yes, the ideal of *jivan-mukti* itself may be too abstract and difficult for most people to take as a personal ideal, but the swami made spirituality living and possible by his living example, and also by bringing Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on *vijnana* into the realm of everyday practice. 'Do not seek for Him, just see Him' (7.29), as the swami says in his *Inspired Talks*.

This combination of the living example of a *jivan-mukta* together with the possibility of seeing everything as God, worshipping everything as God, seeing all action as sacred, is a powerful and transformative idea.

The swami gave a new idea of time and space

consistent with modern scientific views, but going beyond the scientific view by pointing to what is beyond: the universe is the transcendent Reality seen through time and space. The new, scientific view of time and space is conceptual. Einstein's theories of relativity do not change our everyday experience, but simply change our intellectual interpretation of time and space to the scientific understanding of relativity. But Swami Vivekananda taught us how, through spiritual practice, our very experience, our perception, changes, and how we eventually transcend the experience of time and space altogether. 'Can you realise there will come a time when everything will crumble in the dust and you will stand alone? That moment of ecstatic joy will never leave you. You will actually find that you are without bodies. You never had bodies' (2.472).

And there is so much more that he did: he made an interior depth and focus available to an excessively extroverted Western civilization; he proclaimed the primary value of thought to an action-oriented civilization; he resuscitated philosophy as a viable tool in the search for truth by making it experience-based, unlike the head-scratching intellectual pursuit it had become for long centuries in the West; he made religion experiential and experimental, scientific, not creedal as it had been for ages; he showed the social implications of Vedanta in lectures such as 'Vedanta and Privilege' and 'Is Vedanta the Future Religion?'; and so much more. But this is enough to show how he changed the very foundations of civilization.

All Are My God

Is all this an exaggeration? Time will tell, but I do not think so. Swami Vivekananda worked at a profound level, changing the very structure of human thought, the presuppositions that govern human experience, not just in a few individuals

that were his students, but in humanity itself. That is only beginning to manifest, and it is *that*, I am convinced, that we see popping up, seemingly of its own, in unexpected places around the West and in other parts of the world as well. As time goes on people will look back and see a new direction to history that began around the time of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

This new foundation will have unity in diversity as its fundamental insight; everything in nature, everyone in society is unique, and yet a unique manifestation of a universal Reality. All religions are to be respected, and not just religions, as Swami Vivekananda said: 'You must remember that humanity travels not from error to truth, but from truth to truth; ... from lower truth to higher truth, but never from error to truth' (4.147). This means that there is only Truth. Therefore, everyone is trying to express the same truth. I may not be a Marxist, yet I can learn from Karl Marx because he was looking at and trying to give expression to the same truth, from his standpoint. I may not be a Freudian, but I can learn from Freud because he, too, was looking at the same Reality from another standpoint and giving expression to his experience, incomplete though it be.


Boys and girls will be taught from childhood that they, like everyone, are children of immortal bliss, one with Reality itself, not born in sin but as manifestations of God. They will learn that all power is within them and that mistakes are just that, errors resulting only from a failure to remember and manifest our true nature, not to be regretted but to be respected as our teachers, an intrinsic part of manifest life. I will learn to look on the universe and everything within it as the image of God, one with myself. I open my eyes and worship the Self manifest in everything, and I look within where I worship the Self transcending this body and mind.

The democratic urge, so much a part of the emerging world civilization, will be seen as founded in spiritual truth, not just a pragmatic political philosophy governing human animals. All are manifestations of the same Atman: man or woman, black or white, young or old, rich or poor, healthy or unhealthy, saint or sinner, all are worthy of respect, all are objects of worship, because all are the same God, the same Reality.

If society begins to take up this idea, if it spreads, how different will our civilization look! No more pitying the poor from a position of superiority or flattering the rich to gain favor, no more worshipping only the saint while despising the sinner, no more seeking all the good things of life for myself while ignoring the needs of others. All are my God. I offer clothes to my God the naked, food to my God the hungry, education to my God the ignorant, a new hope and new understanding to my God the sinner. If these ideas take hold, even among a strong minority of the population, our human institutions—governmental, judicial, educational, cultural, economic, commercial—will come to express them.

Does this mean a utopian society? No, that is not possible, nor did Swami Vivekananda believe in utopias: the world is a world of opposites. We cannot know good without bad, high without low, pleasure without pain, morality without immorality; nor can we attain genuine love, genuine goodness, genuine unselfishness, without freedom, which includes the freedom to make mistakes and to make bad choices. Though ultimate freedom is far beyond choice-making, it is through choices that we make our way there. Ultimate freedom can be attained only by sentient beings, not by machines. It is the exercise of relative freedom that leads us toward ultimate, transcendent freedom. No, a utopia is not meant.

But there are golden periods in history when spirituality is accessible to many people, when a

sense of higher purpose is prevalent in society, when society itself is oriented towards higher values. Swami Vivekananda believed that a time would come in the not-distant future when, because of widespread education and culture, higher life would become possible for many people, when many would become spiritual, when once again great rishis would walk the earth and daily life would become yoga. And if such a time comes, then indeed it will be the light of India's ancient wisdom that has come to shine on all. 

Notes and Reference

1. See Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), 2.54.
2. See <<http://awesome.good.is/transparency/web/1002/almighty-dollar/flat.html>> accessed 1 September 2011.
3. This is not to deny that the light of India influenced the West even before Swami Vivekananda's historic visit to America, through early translations of the Bhagavadgita, the *Vishnu Purana*, the *Laws of Manu*, and other texts, and through people like Schopenhauer and the American Transcendentalists. But the full light of India's influence, contends the present author, fell on the West with the arrival of Swami Vivekananda in 1893.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.3.
5. Rig Veda 1.164.46.
6. *Complete Works*, 1.II.
7. This influence was not always from the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, but came through a study of early translations of the scriptures or through the American Transcendentalists and others. This influence has in general been downplayed by New Age churches, so that a predominantly Christian audience would not be turned off by 'pagan' influence. But it is part of the historical record.
8. *His Eastern and Western Admirers, Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2004), 148.
9. *Complete Works*, 2.201.



Indian Economy: Linkages, Integrations, and Prospects

Prof. D P Chaudhri

A SEISMIC SHIFT in the perceptions of the leadership of the advanced Western economies about India during recent decades is unmistakable. The opportunities and challenges unfolding in the early decades of the new millennia for India are unprecedented. Creative, sensitive, and 'dharmic' responses would mould India and help humanity move in an accelerated evolutionary direction in the twenty-first

century. In this paper we focus on the underlying economic world forces at work, specifically in India, that have resulted in this shift and assess its potential and pitfalls in the coming decades.

Building Scenarios

The rise of Asia, in particular India and China, in recent decades has been the subject of scholarly debates. Three strands are discernible. The first focuses on rivalry and emerging potential conflict. Bill Emmot summarizes this scenario very well.¹ The second focuses on the rise of China, and is summarized by Martin Jacques.² These two are predicated on conflict and competition, and expect victory of the dominant

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one. The third one is based on competition and cooperation, while avoiding conflict.³ The Asian Development Bank, through rigorous economic modelling involving all important variables, paints a very hopeful, positive scenario for 2050. Its predictions are based on a multipolar global economic order in which Asia regains its pre-eminent position lost 250 years ago to the West, with China and India playing a historic role. It states:

Asia's rise will be led by PRC, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand. In 2010 these seven economies had a combined total population of 3.1 billion (78 per cent of Asia) and a GDP of \$14.2 trillion (87 per cent of Asia). By 2050 their share in population is expected to fall to 73 percent of Asia, while the share of GDP rises to 90 percent. These seven economies alone will account for 45 percent of global GDP. Their average per capita income of \$45,800 (PPP) would be 25 per cent higher than the global average of \$36,600.⁴

This positive scenario is based on cautious optimism, rooted in the emerging role of interactions between cooperation and competition. Ridley on evolution of prosperity,⁵ Nowak and Highfield on evolutionary biology,⁶ and Brandenburger and Nalebuff on high pay-offs in business⁷ advance powerful arguments for win-win strategies in business and global interactions. Bo Ekman, among many others, reminds us that global problems need cooperative global solutions, and European models of nation states perusing national self-interest only are dated and incapable of providing creative responses. Therefore, those emphasising mainly self-interest are bound to fail in the emerging global order.⁸

Emerging Economic Trends

Idealists of modern India gave us an egalitarian,

secular, pluralistic, and progressive constitution, despite their own elitist backgrounds.⁹ Speaking on 'The Dawn of Freedom', minutes before his oath-taking in August 1947, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan concluded: 'Our pledge tells us that this ancient land shall attain her rightful and honoured place. ... Swarajya is that kind of tolerant attitude which sees in brother man the face Divine.'¹⁰ India's tradition of argumentation, intellectual rigour, and tolerance for differences of opinions gave her an idealist constitution in 1950. This was the consequence of a cumulative, but accommodative, learning processes in India's time-honoured tradition. In January 1950 the Republic smoothly initiated the task of managing the transitions from a colonial economy to that of an inclusive and vibrant one. The constitution's directive was to eliminate feudalism, elitism, untouchability, economic, social, and educational exclusions in a time-bound manner. Hastening to usher in agrarian, industrial, educational, and social revolutions simultaneously rather than, as had happened in Western Europe, sequentially was a tall order. Goals, jerks, and roadblocks have been manageable. The processes have unleashed forces and outcomes that inspire confidence and pride. It is a work-in-progress and will take a few more generations. And the reversal is very unlikely. We telescope six decades of progress and prospects for the next four, focusing only on the big picture and abstracting from details.¹¹

The history of the Indian economy during the colonial period is that of poverty, famines, and stagnation. It had been restructured over a century to meet the economic interests of the imperial rulers.¹² Per capita income had been stagnant during the first half of the twentieth century.¹³ The challenge of decoupling colonial modes of production from domestic

Figure 1: Real GDP Per Capita (in 1948–9 ₹ (log scale))

Data source: S Sivasubramanian, *National Income of India in the Twentieth Century*, table 6.11 and appendix table 8(b)

needs-and-demands-based ones has been successfully met to a significant extent.

In figure 1 we present trends in real per capita income for the entire twentieth century. Three points are noteworthy. First, between 1900 and 1950—the period of British Raj—per capita income, despite fluctuations, was virtually static. Second, between 1950 and 1980 the spell of stagnation has been successfully broken and per capita income started trending upwards. These thirty years have also been the period of population growth. Third, acceleration in the trend growth of per capita income from the mid-1980s is unmistakable. The opening up of the Indian economy in the 1990s resulted in an accelerated economic growth, mainly because of the sound foundations laid during three decades of planned efforts, despite crises of food shortages, foreign exchange, and political emergency.¹⁴

In figure 2 (next page) we present the index of growth of population, gross domestic product

(GDP), and food production in India from 1950 to 2011. Acceleration in population growth between 1950–1 and 1991 is unmistakable. The index increased from 100 to over 300 during the 60 years. Output of foodgrains during this period increased faster than the growth in the index of population. It rose from 100 to 415. Foodgrain output between 1970 and 1991—the green revolution decades—grew at a faster rate with a slight slowing down from 1991. The most impressive component is growth in the index of GDP in constant prices. It increased from the base of 100 in 1950 to 2,000 in 2011, giving us a twenty-fold rise. The index grew slowly between 1950 and 1980, started accelerating between 1980 and 2000, and has been in the process of taking off like a rocket from a launching pad since 2001. Actual data on these variables is given in the table under figure 2 below. The break from the stagnation of the colonial period is obvious and acceleration in the rate of growth of GDP is impressive.¹⁵

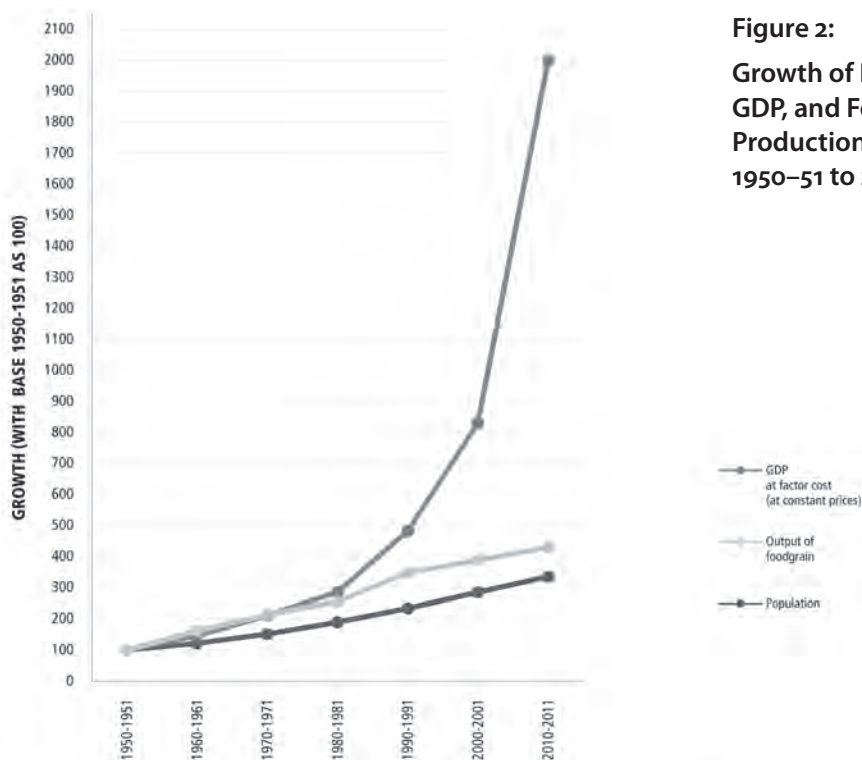


Figure 2:
Growth of Population,
GDP, and Foodgrain
Production from
1950–51 to 2010–11

Year	Population (in millions)	GDP at factor cost (at constant prices in ₹ Crore)	Output of foodgrains (million tons)
1950-1951	361	224,786	50.8
1960-1961	439	329,825	82
1970-1971	548	474,131	108.4
1980-1981	683	641,921	129.6
1990-1991	846	1,083,572	176.4
2000-2001	1,028.7	1,864,300	196.8
2010-2011	1,210.2	4,493,743	218.2

Data source: GDP and output of foodgrains from *Economic Survey 2010–11*

Demography is Destiny

The life expectancy of a child born in British India of the 1940s was 32 years. In 2001 it has doubled to 65 years, and is projected to reach 75 years by 2021.¹⁶ Addition of over three decades to the life of an average Indian in half a century is in line with the rest of the world. To catch up with economically advanced countries we

still need to cover a gap of about 15 years and to aspire to 100 years, that Indians pray for, we have another one third of the distance to cover. Both are within India's reach, provided public policy makes investment in health and education a priority.¹⁷

Adding years to life in India have been the result of cooperative efforts of the United Nations'

specialized agencies like WHO, UNICEF, and the member states. However, adding life to years requires a collective effort on the part of households, communities, and the states within India. In this regard India's success has been positive but disappointingly limited. The Human Development Index (HDI) was created by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1990. The HDI for India in 1980 was 0.32, and it has risen to 0.52 in 2010.¹⁸ The index has three components of human development: income per capita, life expectancy, and school education. India's rank is way below that of China.

The population of India in 1951 was 360 million, of which 134 million were children below the age of 15. In 2011, within a population of 1,210 million, 330 million were children.¹⁹ Child population growth has stabilized at around 330 million, having peaked in 2001, and is projected to remain stable till 2026. The neglect of quality universal elementary education during the first four decades of the Republic created serious consequences not only for perpetuation of poverty but for employability and social exclusion as well. In 2005 one out of three children were living in absolute poverty, despite high growth rates of the economy—it was one in two in 1993.²⁰ These children will be entering the labour force during the next 5 to 15 years. Ensuring that their educational and health needs are fully met is an equity imperative of inclusive growth. Their future and that of resurgent India are organically intertwined.

Education, Innovations, and Overflow

High priority accorded to quality world-class higher education in the early decades of the Republic was due to the urgency of modernizing India and catching up with the advanced Western economies. The *Radhakrishnan Committee Report on Higher Education* (1949) and aspects

of the *Education Commission Report* (1966), dealing with higher education components, were implemented with a degree of urgency. Deemed universities and institutions of national importance were created, along with the establishment of advanced centres in conventional universities. The growth in sheer numbers is impressive: an eighteen-fold increase in universities and a fourteen-fold increase in institutions of national importance.²¹

Elitist India followed the logic of meritocracy in staffing enrolments, with a slight concession for scheduled castes and tribes in the newly established centres and institutes of national importance. Fees were nominal, merit and concessional scholarships were accessible to a significant minority. This broke the hold of caste and wealth privileges of traditional India for upward mobility through higher education. The politicians respected the autonomy of these institutions. The consequences for India, and to an extent for the advanced Western economies, were virtually transformational unfolding in the subsequent four decades.

A professional middle class, bilingual, with a modern scientific and global outlook, having pride in its technical competence, and rather impatient with a slow-moving traditional India emerged within a decade. Its number and clout continue to grow within India and also internationally—its number is estimated at 350 million.

The rising need for skilled manpower within India was met mainly from the newly created domestic supplies. These temples of learning, having established linkages with the best universities and institutions in the world, acted as efficient means of transfer of technology and collaborative research. In view of India's attempt at 'frugal scientific research' and comparatively low financial rewards for professionals,

an overflow to higher facilities and rewards in the West, called brain drain, resulted. Western institutions and governments took full advantage of acquiring skilled manpower virtually as a gift from India.²² Ravindra Kumar Jain brings out the interactions between distinctive civilizational values and contemporary modernity, which underlie the relation between India and her diaspora.²³ Ramin Jahanbegloo suggests that ‘Indians built India on their own, gradually, imperceptibly, and in spite of global challenges during the past sixty years. The new India has given every Indian in any part of the world the ability to look back and to say proudly: “I belong to the Indian civilization.”’²⁴

Re-integrating Domestic Economy

Economics is not physics. No unique way of integrating economic sub-systems into a national system can be considered ideal in abstraction.²⁵ The Republic’s policymakers set about reintegrating the Indian economy for all non-essential industrial consumer products and services through the market system. It was a demand driven competitive process. They started controlled and guided reintegration of the Indian market for essential foodgrains, short supply agricultural and agro-based products, and similar mass consumption products. The blending of the newly created public sector producers and distributors with the private sectors, and the public sector playing a lead role in the first fifteen years, was a uniquely Indian experiment. Slowly shifting the balance to demand driven, the private sector led national markets for all private goods and services, except essential foodgrains and a few other short supply items that began in the 1980s. The shifts occurred in many small steps over four periods: the Nehru era (1950–65), the decades of transition (1966–80), the drive to nationally integrated markets (1980–2000), and the fully integrated demand

driven national market for all consumer products and services (from 2000 onwards).²⁶ The process continues and is aiming at global integration for tradable goods and services.

The provision of public and quasi-public goods and services, which are necessarily part of the duties of the sovereign, has been very uneven in production and delivery across India. This has been a roadblock for inclusive development for some states and communities in different parts of India. The need for efficient production and delivery across India cannot be overemphasized. The provision of health and quality school education remain India’s major bottleneck to further acceleration of economic growth and inclusive development.

Re-entry into the Global Trading System

Domestic and international trade, when free and competitive, has the potential of delivering efficiency in production and resource use as well as major welfare gains for the participants. From time immemorial India has been a major global trader in high-value industrial products and foodgrains. Navigators, fortune seekers, and traders of sixteenth-century Europe were looking for trade routes to India and were keen to establish trading posts here to take advantage of the rising demand for these products in Europe. Maddison has compiled historical data and shown that India and China were major players in global trade 250 years ago.²⁷ Colonial trade was neither competitive nor free; creating major gains for the imperial country it had the potential for impoverishing the colony, as happened to India during the British Raj.²⁸ The Republic’s policymakers, as part of the development strategy of 1950–65, chose to minimize the participation in the global trading system of post-World War II that lacked a level playing field. India’s industrial, technology, and skills base was in need

of development so as to acquire dynamic comparative advantage. By the 1980s India was ready to re-enter the global trading system in areas where it had developed comparative advantage. The opening up of the Indian economy in 1991 is seen as a turning point, though the foundations were laid during the earlier four decades. India's emergence as a global player in information technology, generic medicinal products, and similar high skill-based exports are the consequences of strategic investments in knowledge and skill formation.²⁹ The human capital investments of the early decades of the Republic have started paying off. Those of today would bear fruits in twenty to thirty years. The neo-liberal global trading system is also getting levelled up partly through trade negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).³⁰ The scope and scale of free trade agreements that India is entering into augurs well for the future of India's participation in the global trading system as a major player (200–1).

Food Security, Inequality, and Rural Development

The Indian Republic has not had a full-blown agricultural revolution. Agricultural policies, despite the five-year plans, mainly responded to the crises of the time rather than pursuing a consistent modernisation strategy. The food crisis of the 1960s was the biggest single challenge that produced a determined positive and sustained policy, ushering in the green revolution. The establishment of a large number of agricultural universities, institutions like the Food Corporation of India, the Agricultural Prices Commission, and Seed Corporation of India during the 1960s demonstrated to the world and Indians that national food security was and continues to be a priority. Policy support for mainly wheat and rice crops created a number of unintended consequences for various states and

regional agricultural specialisations. Acharya and Chaudhri plead for a twenty-first-century agricultural policy strategy and re-calibration. The cost of achieving national level food security through the green revolution was at the neglect of coarse grains—jowar, bajra, millets—consumed by the poor. Attempts at protecting the poor through public distribution of foodgrains, mainly wheat and rice, at subsidized prices have created policy conundrums with serious consequences for poverty and inequality.³¹ Lea and Chaudhri had shown that successful reformist's rural development strategies require egalitarian land reforms, universal elementary education, major investments in rural infrastructure, and competitive nationally integrated markets for agricultural products.³² These could only be achieved when there is pressure from above and also pressure from below, which makes policy-makers deliver on the promised reforms. Kerala, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh in India met some of these preconditions, while half of India is still struggling with these issues.³³

The weakest link in India's inclusive development strategy is lack of political will to usher in a major shift in agricultural and rural development strategy. In its absence, one in three Indians will remain poor and in need of a handout, which is a challenge to human dignity and a policy nightmare. This is not to underplay the impressive gains in food and agricultural output and productivity as well as the impressive decline in rural poverty. However, we have miles to go.³⁴

Retrospect and Prospects

Domestic savings and investment increased from about 5 per cent in 1950 to 35 per cent in 2011. This alone will ensure continued growth at the current rates of 8 to 9 per cent. Domestic demand has played a dominant role in India's accelerated economic growth, and its importance will

further strengthen growth impulses, with per capita income doubling every ten years. India's re-entry into the global trading system—at the lower end textiles exports and at the top end IT and skill-based exports—will help domestic savings and investment as well as consumption led growth impulses. The linkages of investment and trade within Asia and across the world will also improve growth and development over time in India and her neighbourhood.

The big push strategy of higher education and the green revolution that yielded huge payoffs is being extended to elementary education and health. Modernising the entire agricultural sector and sharing gains from economic growth and trade will keep inequality in check and also make it a solvent of absolute poverty. The rationale is now backed by India's improved understanding of mutual benefits from poverty reduction and inclusive growth. For example, Banerjee and Dufflo³⁵ and Karlan and Appel³⁶ tell us that it is possible to escape the poverty trap through orchestrated policies, and Prahalad advises business corporations that serving the poor can also be good for profits.³⁷

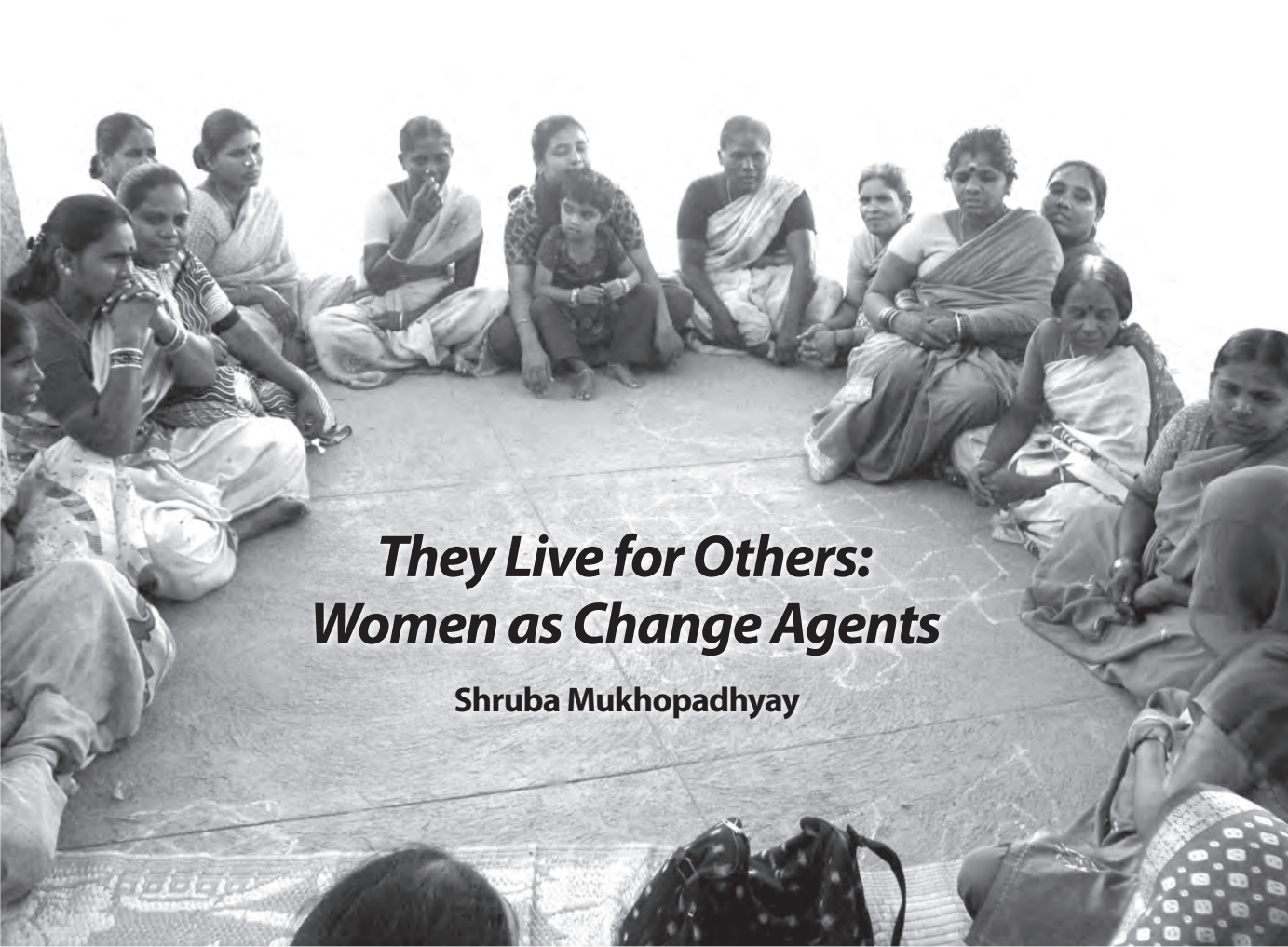
Imperatives of inclusive and egalitarian economic growth have unleashed churning processes globally, particularly in Asia, that requires a change of mindset. These newer challenges need 'dharmic' public policy responses within India and enthusiastic extension to the global inequality and poverty reduction strategies. Worldwide, and especially in India, poverty is largely a rural phenomenon.³⁸ India's success must be shared generously with the poorest of the earth. Swami Vivekananda asserted: 'May I be born again and again, and suffer a thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species.'³⁹



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They Live for Others: Women as Change Agents

Shruba Mukhopadhyay

THEY HAVE NOT HEARD about 'karma yoga', nor do they aspire to go to heaven for their good deeds. Their only problem is that when their neighbours suffer from violence they writhe in pain; when a child goes to bed without having its meal, as the foodgrains meant for the poor is sold in the open market, they feel the pangs of hunger; and when the life of a girl child is snuffed out at the mother's womb, they take it as if their daughters are brutalized.

They are 'ordinary' women—one can find them in villages, urban slums, roadside shanties, agricultural fields and factories—who have

shown 'extraordinary' courage to live for others. They have suffered humiliation, physical abuse, even threats to life, but they never gave up.

'With Folded Hands'

When Kamla Meena took charge as a member in the Suriya Panchayat in the Tonk district of Rajasthan, she was asked to sit on the floor. The Rajput Sarpanch refused to sit beside his dalit colleague, even though she has been officially appointed for that post.

'But I did not take an attitude of confrontation. Rather, I started working for the people in my own way,' Kamla says.

Her first victory came when she could prevent an upper-caste villager from converting a community well into his private property.

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Kamla did find out from government records that the well had been constructed on community land and the villagers had contributed 700 rupees for the construction work. Kamla also ensured that a road was constructed right up to the village school and set up a monitoring group of fifteen women to check the quality of construction materials and also to oversee the entire process.

She took great pains to ensure that the villagers could avail themselves of the government schemes like health insurance for the unorganized sector, below poverty line (BPL) cards and foodgrains at a cheaper rate, voter's identity cards, special financial assistance for the girl child and mothers-to-be. She not only informed them about the schemes, but also escorted them to the district headquarters for completing the formalities so that they were not fooled by the touts or harassed by the officials.

Jealous of her popularity, the Sarpanch tried to malign her by spreading rumours about her moral character; but he had to beat a retreat when villagers poured in at her doorstep and said: 'Please go wherever you want, talk to anyone you like, sit wherever you wish to, but get us *zamin* (land), *bijli* (electricity), and *pani* (water).'

Kamla got back her chair; but she did not forget her people. Herself illiterate till the age of thirty, Kamla has achieved 100 per cent literacy for the girls in her village. 'When I first came to attend my office, everybody wanted to make fun of me, and so they gave me a bunch of papers to read. Since I could not read, I used to hold those papers upside down and they used to have a hearty laugh. I cannot allow that to happen with any of the girls here,' Kamla says.

Always keen to show the way through practice rather than preaching, she got her widowed daughter-in-law—she lost one of her sons in an

accident—admitted to school. She also ensured that all girls, who were keen to enrol themselves for further studies, obtain bicycles from the district administration so that they could commute daily to their college.

Kamla staged a 'revolution of sorts' when she asked for drumbeats and distribution of sweets on the birth of her granddaughter, even though these customs are followed to celebrate the birth of a son in rural Rajasthan.

Trained by Cecodecon, a Jaipur-based NGO, Kamla is also an ardent supporter of *desi* seeds and indigenous methods of farming instead of using harmful pesticides—she has even travelled to Hong Kong and Bangladesh, along with the NGO delegates, to speak about the issue.

Ask her what is her reward for all the hard work she has put in and her wrinkled face lights up: 'All those people who have refused to allow me to sit on a chair now greet me with folded hands,' she says.

Cleaning the System

But not all 'foot soldiers of change' are fortunate like her. When Vimala used to visit the east Delhi slums to take up their problems, even the women refused to listen to her as they dismissed her as another agent of a local political leader. For days she used to sit at the doorsteps of the women, waiting patiently till their household chores were over so that she could convince them that they are also entitled to clean water, sewerage, toilet facilities, and other services from government agencies.

The women in Kalyanpuri slum wanted to give her a chance, and fifteen of them accompanied her to the nearest Municipality of Delhi (MCD) office to demand cleaning of the drains and public toilets in the area. 'The MCD staff stopped chewing *pan* (betel leaf), looked at us, and said with contempt that the drains are

clogged as we put all our garbage there. He also told us to stay away as our clothes were stinking,' says Vimala.

Having spent five or six years in this field, Vimala knew the road ahead, and through a Right to Information application she came to know that there is an MCD employee for cleaning the drains and public toilets in the area and that he earns a monthly salary of 10,000 rupees. With the help of the Centre for Advocacy and Research, a civil society organization, she also made a four-minute video film on the condition of the sewerage, toilets, and other public amenities in the slum.

'With the help of the NGO we got an appointment with the Lt Governor, but he could not watch the film showing stained toilets and clogged drains for more than a minute. He wrote to the MCD, but nothing happened immediately,' says Vimala. The women then took their film to the Planning Commission and argued their case before eleven high officials, showing them how taxpayers' money was flowing down the drain.

As government officials and MCD employees started making frequent visits to the area, Vimala's supporters grew in numbers. Within the span of a few months seven toilets were constructed for the slum dwellers in that area. Women gave the design for the new drainage system, specified how the chambers should be cleaned, kept an eye on the quality of the construction materials, and also formed inspection groups to check the cleaning and maintenance of the sewerage system and the toilets.

The next destination of Vimala and her comrades was Jal Board office. When the group confronted a junior engineer, he asked: 'Are the slum dwellers entitled to water connections?' He sent them back saying that he would check it with his seniors. The same story was repeated not once

but thrice, and then the women decided to play their trick.

'We were a group of say fifty or sixty women to sit in *dharna* inside the office compound—women with hijabs, mothers, daughters, elderly, physically challenged—there were women everywhere,' says Vimala's assistant Usha as she tries to adjust her *pallu*, part of her sari, on her head. The problem was solved, but not for Usha, who did not get the connection for some other reason. And see, she is not bothered: 'True, I have to trudge quite a distance for water, but I am happy that other women have been saved from that trouble,' she says. 'If you have any water problem, let me know. All the Jal Board engineers know me well and I have all their numbers,' says Usha as she takes out a yellowish paper from the corner of her sari.

'Our Unity Is Our Strength'

Usha's neighbour Kamlesh, another member of the women's group being groomed by Vimala, also has the same attitude. Even though she has nothing to get from the Public Distribution System, she leaves her four children and household chores and sits near the local ration shop just to keep a watch on whether the owner is distributing sub-standard foodgrains.

'We have learnt it from Vimala,' says Kamlesh, as she looks at her mentor. She narrates how Vimala has invited the wrath of the local political leaders in her efforts to make the women aware of the various government schemes like BPL card, health insurance, and the like. She informs them where to obtain the application forms, how to go about the formalities, and also tells them that the government does not charge any fees for such services.

'Earlier the agents of these political leaders used to take hefty amounts from these poor women, even for filling up application forms or

attestation. Now the women do not depend on them and thus the agents are upset with me,' says Vimala. But she is not scared. 'I have suffered enough due to domestic violence, poverty, and illiteracy and I do not want anyone else to go through that experience. This is my *brat*, *tij*, and *teohar* (ritual, festival, and celebration)—call me an atheist if you want.'

Perhaps the most illustrious example of standing strong in spite of threat and enticement is Aparna (name changed) in a small town in Rajasthan. When pregnant with her seventh child, she posed as a decoy and got arrested a doctor couple who used to practise sex-selective abortions. The powerful lobby of the doctors and owners of diagnostic labs threatened her with dire consequences and asked her to change her statement in court.

'It was a Diwali evening and I was alone at home with my six daughters. My husband was in hospital, as he was suffering from a liver disease, when they came to my home. They offered to pay for my husband's medical expenses and also promised hefty fixed deposits for each of my daughters,' recalls Aparna. 'I was not sure from where I would get food for my children, not sure of their future, but still I refused. I was sure that what I was doing was *right* and what they were asking me to do was *wrong*. There can hardly be a choice,' she says as her eyes turn moist.


This strong sense of wrong and right has also motivated Hasina, Lokamma, and Malamma—all from different slums in Bengaluru—to raise their voice against exploitation and injustice. They have braved resistance from their family members, including husbands and sons, who have disapproved of their going out for meetings, facing the wrath of the local hooligans, and taking part in demonstrations in public places. 'It is better if you pay more attention to your household chores and children rather than

aspiring to be a leader,' Hasina's husband used to tell her as he was critical of her public life.

But she got the opportunity to prove herself when a seventeen-year-old boy was picked up by the police from her locality without showing any reason. Hasina and her group were shown the door when they asked to see the warrant. Determined to find justice for the boy they barged into the office of the zonal police commissioner and pleaded their case. The young boy was back the next day. Now Hasina's task is to make people aware of their citizen rights and also the methods of redressal when those rights are violated. She also talks about the rules that the police and administration need to follow to protect those rights. She is also working to set up an all-women police station near her locality in Sanjay Gandhi Nagar.

Movements led by Malamma have led to enquiry and sealing of a number of ration shops, but not before the shop owners locked her up in their godown for a day. The forty-three-year-old gutsy lady stood her ground against distribution of sub-standard foodgrains and sale of ration meant for the BPL card holders in the open market. She does not regret her decision to come forward and serve others, even at the cost of her own safety and comfort. 'Working for others has given me a new identity, a new meaning to my life. I could not have asked for a better reward,' she says.

What is the secret of their strength? Lokamma is quite clear when she says: 'Our unity is our strength. If all of us are here together, I am not even scared to go and meet the chief minister. After all, why should we be scared? Are we doing anything for ourselves?'

No, they are not. Here comes the deluge of women power—Mother's power—that will wash away the stain of injustice, stink of selfishness, and the filth of indiscrimination. 



Envisioning a Healthy India

Dr Saibal Gupta

THE VISION, PASSION, AND WORK of Swami Vivekananda were the major stimuli for reawakening India and inspiring the youth to struggle for independence. The methods employed in the process differed, but the goal was freedom from colonial rule. The next step was building a united healthy India as a modern nation, based on her spiritual heritage. Political freedom was not Swamiji's only concern; he was also a social philosopher concerned with developing humankind through a holistic view of the individual. To his Vedantic vision the one and the many were the same reality. There are aspects that need defining and correcting in today's India in order to fructify Swamiji's vision.

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What is the nation and what are its boundaries? India has never been politically unified except during some periods of conquest through a central authority. However, even under powerful sovereigns, the assorted races and people did not have the political perception of a single nation. This perception influenced the subcontinent's political history throughout the ages. All through, various people wanted to be a part of India—by conquest, or by trade and commerce, or as refugees, or as students, or as spiritual seekers. It is curious that amid all social upheavals a philosophical and religious bonding has always held India as an entity. This unification started in ancient times. It matured in the epic age of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and was later consolidated during the Puranic age. The philosophical boundaries of India were uniquely defined in some Puranas. One wonders at the vision in the *Shiva Purana*—nobody knows who

the visionaries were—that placed the segments of the Goddess Sati's body from Kamakshya in the East to Hinglaj in the West, and from Kanakumari in the South to Kashmir and Nepal in the North. They had installed the boundaries of a nation not by producing a map, not through political entities, but by a philosophical and emotional bonding. Besides, there were also the twelve *vyotirlingas*, luminous symbols of Shiva, and places connected with Vishnu, which made people travel from one part of the country to another to visit them.

Secondly, what do we mean by a spiritual heritage? Is it the heritage of an emotionally bonded India? True, the bonding has always been religion, but the methods of religious living, through which an individual can realize God, have never been straitjacketed; there has always been considerable latitude to preferences and orientations to follow the numerous scriptures and saints. God realization, whatever be its intellectual and other dimensions, was the foundation of ethics in all walks of life, from the king to the lowest citizen, including physicians. That general ethical background might have had its variations and violations, but it provided a gold standard.

Defining Health and Its Philosophy

The medical profession in India was noble and refined and had high ethical standards. The *Sushruta Samhita* exhorts the students: 'Above all, the aim of Ayurveda is the attainment of the ultimate truth or salvation by which the human mind realizes the identity of the individual soul with the Universal Soul and can thus rise above unhappiness, pain, and mortal destruction.'¹ There is no other medical tradition in the world that speaks in such a manner. The *Charaka Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita* were compiled in written form between 1000 and 700 BCE and their attitudinal and moral principles were

derived from Vedic literature. Ayurveda originated as a part of the Atharva Veda, and the initiation of students started with recitations from the Shrutis. Whereas some of the written texts of the Shrutis under incompetent hands underwent some distortions, those in the medical texts remained intact. Contrary to other regulations in ancient Indian society, there were no religious or caste barriers for studying medicine. The first extant compilation of the *Sushruta Samhita* was by Nagarjuna (c.150–250 CE), founder of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism. He compiled the entire *Sushruta Samhita*, organized its one hundred and twenty chapters into five books, and added his own contribution in a sixth book named 'Uttaratantra'. Any man could be a medical student, once he convinced the teacher of his moral standing and basic learning. Today we demand a science education to become a doctor. Science education was extensive in those days too: mathematics, chemistry, physics, navigation, ship building, astronomy, metallurgy, architecture, to name a few. But for medical studies moral and ethical standards were of prime importance. Education in the humanities is gradually gaining greater importance in the West today. There are universities where the humanities and science education are given equal merit for admission to medical courses, and the experience has been that such education makes better community doctors. At present a doctor in India receives practically no education in the humanities and ethics, let alone imbibing the holistic view of medicine and its practice. The result is much unhappiness with the medical profession and with doctors' attitudes. A doctor in those days knew and believed that the manifestation of the Divine is the highest in humans, and serving them is serving God.

Ayurveda did not concern itself only with curative medicine, it also developed preventive

medicine—today termed positive health—which includes mental health. Physical and mental training were instruments of positive health. Meditation formed an important part of the medical curricula. A surgeon was advised to examine the patient in detail once again just before the operation, then sit in meditation to concentrate on the operation to be performed, and finally to control his own body and mind. The doctor then washed himself and entered the operation room, which had been cleaned and fumigated. The area of the patient's body to be operated on was cleaned with antiseptics. The entire process of a surgical operation was divided into three phases: *purvakarma*, *pradhanakarma*, and *pashchatkarma*, which correspond to the preoperative, operative, and postoperative care of our times. These aseptic precautions were introduced in Western medicine only in the early nineteenth century after Lord Lister. To ensure health for all citizens a king was to make provision for clean drinking water in every village, plant trees in a planned manner in villages and by roadsides, and monitor the disposal of garbage outside the village or city limits through incineration. The idea of vaccination was not present, but there were potions for preventing some diseases that we mostly do not understand today.

The curriculum of medical education included both surgery and medicine. Sushruta taught that the union of medicine and surgery makes a complete doctor. The doctor who lacked the knowledge of one of these branches was like a bird with only one wing. The interactive and multidisciplinary medical education that was then advocated is neglected today in our system more than in the West. The probable reason is the mistaken notion of the need to super-specialize in one area, or one type of surgery, which is enough to earn a lot of money. Through this blind attitude a patient is no longer seen as a complete individual, but as made of disjointed parts. This notion is

against our heritage of looking at a person, sick or otherwise, holistically, and it increases the cost of treatment and the patient's resentment as well. After qualifying as a doctor the student used to receive the final blessing and exhortation from the teacher that constitutes the oath:

Dedicate yourself entirely to helping the sick, even though this be at the cost of your own life. Never harm the sick, not even in thought. Endeavor always to perfect your knowledge. Treat no women except in the presence of their husbands. The physician should observe all the rules of good dress and good conduct. As soon as he is with a patient, he should concern himself in word and thought with nothing but the sufferer's case. He must not speak outside the house of anything that takes place in the patient's house. He must not speak to a patient of his possible death if by so doing he hurts the patient or anyone else. In the sight of the gods you are to pledge yourself to this. May the gods help you if you follow this rule. Otherwise, may the gods be against you.²

This oath from Charaka predates the Hippocratic oath by many centuries and the philosophy of its sublime text is self-revealing. 'The Arabic version of the *Sushruta Samhita* is known by the name of *Kelale-Shawshoore-al-Hindi*. It was rendered into Latin and formed the basis of European medicine till the seventeenth century' (ibid.).

How far did the ancient Indian medicine succeed cannot be answered today, as we do not have any data from those times. But we do know that in the nineteenth century, when European medicine came in contact with Indian medicine, there was not much difference between the two in the understanding and treatment of many diseases like tuberculosis, diabetes, and typhoid fever.³ The Indian surgical practice was superior in many areas and operations were performed on all areas of the body except the chest. Although

India had developed aseptic surgery, there was no idea of bacteria, as the microscope was not invented or used in India. Asepsis, antisepsis, and cross-infection were understood. Emperor Ashoka in his *Girnar Edict* stated that he built hospitals for both people and animals. A century later, King Duttha Gamani of Ceylon listed among his good deeds the founding of eighteen hospitals for the poor. The diagrams and layout plans for the hospitals of those times are still available. Individual rooms were preferred, as poisons could spread from one patient to another through cross-infection. Infected patients with infectious diseases were segregated. In contrast, the earliest Greek hospitals in the temples of Aesculapius were open halls.

Another more modern comparison is the life of Dr Ignaz Semmelweiss (c.1818–65 CE). He was a practising gynaecologist who introduced asepsis in Vienna. By close observation, which in today's scientific parlance could be called the double-blind trial, he discovered the cause of childbirth fever or puerperal sepsis that claimed the lives of many mothers. He was literally chased out of Vienna because he showed that puerperal sepsis could be prevented by wearing clean gowns and by washing hands before touching a pregnant mother—he compared the incidence in his ward with that of the others. He went back to Hungary, but even there was thrown out of hospitals for propagating his conviction. Though he died as a broken man in his village, his knowledge spread and the thread was picked up by people like Louis Pasteur, in France, who discovered bacteria. But it was Lord Lister who associated them with surgical infection and introduced asepsis in surgery in the early nineteenth century. Semmelweiss would not have died as a broken man in the ethical medical practice of ancient India. Knowledge was not a personal property in India's tradition; new knowledge was an extension of

the existing knowledge and was shared by all. This is true even now—though at present intellectual property rights cheat the sick by changing one atom in a molecule of a drug and raising its price many times.

Evaluation of Ancient Indian Medicine

Where would ancient India stand in the modern parameters of the Human Development Index (HDI) as constituted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)? Prof. Amartya Sen's ideas on human development have influenced the construction of the HDI that the UNDP has been reporting for different countries of the world every year since 1990.⁴ Not being an economist I can only quote professor S K Chatterjee: 'The UNDP translates crudely Sen's thinking into practice by replacing the capability set of an individual by his or her achieved combination of functionings.'⁵ This has been termed by some persons as dairy farm economics to increase milk, meat, and eggs production. Since then the UNDP has introduced certain other indices to take into account other aspects of the development of a society. Prof. Chatterjee has written about indices that can be introduced by mathematically calculating Swami Vivekananda's ideas of 'holistic collective development' with Sen's 'capabilities set' approach as the true marker of human aspects of well-being in a society.

Health constitutes only a portion of the HDI, and many of the parameters are not available for ancient India, like life expectancy at birth, child mortality, nutritional status, incidence of famines and epidemics, and so on; however, there are other analysable data. To analyse and evaluate the health scenario one has to examine the *World Health Report 2002: Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life*⁶ in different affluent and not-so-affluent nations of today and extrapolate those values to known lifestyle patterns in ancient and

modern Indian life. By this method it is possible to obtain a rough estimate, and then one can add what is known of the curative medicine for a total picture, which may not be irrelevant.

However, some of the comparisons in modern parameters are possible. For example, life expectancy in ancient India probably would not be lower than 23 years old, as calculated in the India Census of 1931 before major famines and wars happened.⁷ There were regional floods in preceding decades, though only one in Hyderabad was recorded. The life expectancy rose to 32 years in 1947, and at present it has touched almost 70 years. The curious thing in the 1931 census is that life expectancy was higher in the female than in the male population. This could be due to wars and strife killing mostly men, but the female child was probably not as much in danger as in the present situation due to female feticide.

Before evaluating the medical scenario it is pertinent to ask what the aim of medicine is. Is it only to improve the life expectancy or to increase happiness? If the happiness index is becoming increasingly important for the general evaluation of the UNDP, it is even more important for medicine. The happiness index would have been better in ancient times because medical practice was in conformity with the psychic and ethical background of the people, and equally within the reach of the poor as of the rich, including hospital treatment. The oath of Charaka does not mention monetary remuneration, unlike in the Hippocratic Oath or the code of Hammurabi; in ancient India medical teachers and practitioners were largely paid by the king and grateful donations of society. Each teacher was allotted four to six students—a far cry from our present-day crowded classes. Proximity to the teacher helped students imbibe the qualities of the teacher. There were regular symposia and discussions within a group and also with other groups; notes of these

discussions were kept and later, after confirmation, added to the body of the texts. This trend gradually declined in the second millennium of the present era, and Ayurvedic practices slowly degenerated to individual practice. The last notable contribution was around the eleventh century CE from Chakrapani Dutta, who introduced metals in the treatment of diseases.

At present India's mortality rate is a little high. But this could not have been India's position in ancient times. India had the highest share of world GDP till the middle of the Mughal period. In the first century CE it was 32.9 per cent; in 1000 CE 28.9 per cent; in the seventeenth century 24.4 per cent—while that of Europe was 23.3 per cent. The GDP dropped unbelievably to 3.8 per cent in 1952.⁸ The living habits were healthier in the old days. Till contemporary times cooking was never done in the living quarters but in a separate well-ventilated kitchen. Today this is not possible in single-room homes of the middle-class urban dwellers or the poor rural people. Fresh vegetables and fruits formed a larger part of Indian diet, and Ayurveda had special discourses on mental and physical aspects of childcare.

Medicine in India: The Colonial Era

The introduction of modern medicine from the West was a boon to India. It matched the scientific and humanistic traditions of our yesteryear in the teachers and practitioners seen by my generation. Ayurveda had declined in the hands of untrained practitioners. Some knowledge and fragments of ancient books were available to some who earned by the standards of those days—cures did happen but without any rationality. There were very few institutions and the field was cluttered by soothsayers, magicians, astrologers, and home remedies passed down through generations. There were only a few pockets of ancient surgery left in this vast country and some of that amazed

the surgeons from Europe—like the operation of rhinoplasty, plastic surgery to reconstruct the nose, or couching operation for cataract, operations that were described in the *Sushruta Samhita* and practised the world over. The practitioners were often ignorant of the rationality of the procedures. As the colonial governance settled and the need for education—particularly medical education in view of the prevalence of diseases—emerged, the Medical College at Calcutta was established in 1835, followed shortly at Bombay and Madras. Out of five students in the first batch at Calcutta, Madhusudan Gupta performed the first dissection of a dead body in India after a gap of nearly two thousand years, and the event was celebrated by a gun salute from the Fort William at Calcutta! He also was familiar with the surgical discipline of ancient India, edited an English translation of the *Sushruta Samhita*, and knew that Sushruta advocated dissections of human bodies, which was discontinued by the Buddhists during the time of Ashoka the Great.⁹

This first step was followed by continued progress, and medical schools and colleges opened through government as well as private efforts. A larger portion of the hospitals had free beds and provided free treatment, though there also was a small number of paying beds and private cabins. Doctors passing out of medical colleges enjoyed social prestige and respect. Initially the government being dubious about the ability of Indians to imbibe scientific education curtailed the curriculum to *Materia Medica* and *Therapeutics*, to thus produce a class of assistant surgeons that could treat common ailments; but as Indians began to excel, the course was gradually extended. Some of them went to England and passed the examination at the Royal College—the first one to pass the examination of the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons was given a public welcome at the Howrah railway

station and paraded through the city on an elephant. Other doctors opened private clinics and nursing homes in urban and semi-urban areas, and the magic of modern medicine spread. As in general education so in medicine, belying the low estimate of the British, brilliant Indian doctors emerged over the next hundred years, occupying teaching and research positions and making important contributions to medical science. The colonial phase of modern medicine was more or less in line with people's expectations, which included largely free treatment and low expenditure when needed. The doctors were also more humanistic, in line with the ideals of many geniuses who adorned that period.

Modern Medicine in India

India emerged from colonialism through great upheavals and with massive movements of its population, death, hunger, war, and famines. All segments of the country were not equally affected, but the poor and the tribal suffered the most. The social ethics on which India built and won freedom went through severe trauma. Value systems altered and development proceeded slowly. Before society could consolidate its political and economic systems, the call came from the rich G8 nations for liberalization and the opening of economies. There was no way to avoid it but to swim with the current. The socialist ideology of the Nehru era had to be abandoned, as the average rate of growth in GDP from 1950s to 1980s was 3.5 per cent, while per capita income growth averaged only 1.3 per cent per year, which was 10 and 13 per cent in China and Taiwan respectively. With economic liberalization money entered India in a fast-growing stream, enriching the top 1 per cent of the population to Western standards, and a trickle-down effect that benefited another 9 per cent. The rest, 90 per cent of the population, remained more or less the same,

with half of them below the poverty line.

During this process two things happened in the medical field. On one side, modern technology became available and many lifesaving items became tax-free. The health industry became a profitable venture and investment grew rapidly in private medical care, bringing technology to everyone's doorstep. But on the flip side, both state and central governments withdrew rather rapidly from totally free treatment due to rising costs. Even if only 10 per cent could pay for medical treatment—that meant 120 million people roughly—it was a huge market for private medical care. Medical insurance was introduced, though the system is so faulty that only 3 per cent of the population is insured, and that too inadequately. The mechanism for private-public partnership was introduced, but it did not fill the void for common people. Some protection was given to government employees.

Therefore, what is wrong with modern medicine as it is practised in India? The growth of medical science so far has occurred in the West parallel to the growth of other aspects of society. Progress in medicine since World War II has been explosive, but almost all of it in the West and with a corresponding increase in the costs. The harmony between social consciousness and economy on one hand, and medical practice on the other, which has been described in ancient India, exists only in the West to a varying extent. In plain words, a society that can spend money for research can also pay for its utilization, as products are costly in accordance with the economy and are protected by international laws. This is apparent in the cost of drugs and instrumentation. And though many of them are not superior or more useful than what already existed, their aggressive marketing in the Third World succeeds in selling them. Untested drugs are often pushed in the market to pre-empt competitors, which

sometimes produces disasters as in the case of thalidomide babies in the West. And such drugs are now pushed to the Third World. An example is ketamine hydrochloride, a drug used in anaesthesia but later found to be a potent narcotic, which can be administered orally, by nasal spray, or by injection, and can cause death; it is now being manufactured in India and pushed back to the West, where the demand for narcotics is high—a boomerang of the present-day small world.

In India the top 10 per cent of the population can pay for part of modern scientific treatments, according to the technology that has been installed in India. The next 40 per cent does not have access to scientific treatment but to a compromised version of it. Below that, the treatment of the poor is often a matter of consolation. Such a wide variation in the standards of treatment affects both the rich and the poor—even the rich do not know whether the treatment they obtain is appropriate in a particular situation, since very few have knowledge of the extent of possibilities in modern medicine.

There is one thing, we can affirm, that is outpacing the spectacular growth of science, and this thing is corruption. Corruption in government institutions is unfortunately almost accepted, but even private institutions suffer from corruption of a different kind. It is the competition for the market share and consequent maximization of profit that drives such trends; and there is no regulatory authority. Costs are determined by market forces. The competition among medical businesses in cities is unhealthy. An outline of that war is not possible in this article, but in brief the present scenario shows unnecessary investigations, unnecessarily expensive treatment, lack of transparency to patients and relatives, the grabbing of patients and costs unscrupulously by all concerned in the supply chain management, in which the patient is the fodder—this is with

apologies to a large number of honest medical practitioners who have rejected corporate pressure and do whatever they can by themselves, sometimes leaving the big cities.

The cost of treatment is a problem in affluent countries too. In the US the last presidential election was practically decided by those who were outside the health care net. By strong laws and governance a conveyor belt system of medicine takes care of the majority of people, though frustratingly. In India we have no medical governance, and though we have some laws they are not governed by medical science but by other factors. India's knowledge industry in medicine, which was growing in the late colonial era and after independence till the 1980s, has stopped growing and industries are up for sale. There are a few exceptions, of course.

Looking at the Future

What can be done for the future of medical science, which not only cures but heals? Swami Vivekananda did not say much on the curative aspects of medical science in isolation from a total human development. The depth of his compassion for the sick was however revealed during a plague epidemic that occurred in Calcutta in 1898, when he even thought of selling the land of Belur Math for financing the relief work. That first line in the oath of Charaka comes alive in the picture of Nivedita sitting on the floor of a hut, crying with a child's dead body on her lap, oblivious of the danger.

But for us the task is how an equitable healthy India is possible in future? It is not an easy task, because a healthy India first needs a healthy political and economic life, which of course needs a healthy collective mind, as Swami Vivekananda wanted. Only then can the health sector become better. The top priority is to supply safe drinking water and electricity to every village and urban

home in India. With that more than half of the diseases would be eradicated. It would be expensive, but not more than the money stashed in foreign banks, if it can be recovered.

With greater attention and investment in agriculture, procurement, storage without wastage, and distribution of foodgrains food scarcity can be lessened, and in consequence more diseases can be eliminated. If corruption could be eliminated, India would have better nutrition in all segments of society. Every child should be immunized against all infectious diseases at birth, and this should be free of cost. The protocol exists, but lamentably not its implementation. Holistic and collective development is the only means that can encourage healthy habits.

Private medicine is not bad in itself, but profit-motive without responsibility is wrong. Famous medical institutions in the developed world had their beginning through charity. Nowadays it is often seen that giving donations to charities in India is a means to avoid tax. Money is more easily available to religious institutions, but they can reach only a few. People should take the initiative to build medical institutions for the common good. These institutions will be able to draw many unselfish persons to participate in such activities. Then modern medicine will be within the reach of all people. Success in cooperative effort is one of the proposed extended indices of the HDI.¹⁰

It is obvious that developing a healthy India is a utopian dream without human development producing the basic development of society. No less utopian is the hope that a golden day will dawn when we shall become so rich that we can have everything we desire. That day never comes, only strife increases. The India that now perceives herself as politically one needs a different kind of awakening.



(References on page 42)



Illuminating the Darkness

Swami Divyananda

*Andhakarer utsa hote utsarito alo,
sei to tomar alo.
Sakal danda-birodh majhe jagrata je bhalo,
sei to tomar bhalo.*

The light that emanates from
the source of darkness,
That indeed is your light.
The good that remains wakeful in the midst
of all discords and conflicts,
That indeed is your good.¹

AND A RAY OF THAT LIGHT is emerging from a dark cell of the Coffield prison in Anderson County, Texas. The life story of Tracy Lee Kendall is inspiring and may serve as a kind of road map for the reformation of any inmate in any prison on earth. Tracy, an American aged 37, has been serving sixty years of sentence for burglary and murder since 1999 in Coffield prison—the largest in Texas, housing more than 3,600 male inmates, many of whom have already been sentenced to death. In the bondage of a dismal prison

life Tracy had very limited scope and freedom for any positive living. His gloomy life might have ended in utter darkness, like many of the unfortunate prisoners, if his inner self would not have helped him to emerge from obscurity and guided him towards the path of reformation.

The majority of prisoners usually curse their fate and God for their present miserable state, yet some of those who have some spiritual faith try to find solace during imprisonment by praying and by doing certain spiritual practices. In Coffield Tracy had access to faith-based studies and activities and he also became deeply interested in Vedanta and the ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. His experiences were published in 2008 in *Prabuddha Bharata*.² On 23 March 2011 he wrote a letter to the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math, addressing the General Secretary and informing him that he and three of his fellow inmates had taken spiritual initiation from the swami in-charge of the Vedanta Society of Southern California and that they had formed inside the prison a small study circle where they study, discuss, and try to put into practice the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. On

Swami Divyananda is the secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur, and a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

7 January 2010 they founded the Ramakrishna-Vedanta 'Texas Prisoners' Group and on 17 March of the same year they founded the Cofield Vedanta Circle. Inside the four walls of the prison, bounded by strict prison rules of do's and don'ts and with very limited resources and manpower, they started their spiritual endeavour and service to other inmates by following Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals. In his letter, Tracy mentioned:

We have a vision inspired by Swami Vivekananda's revolutionary idea that rather than the monks being beggars, they should serve. We similarly strive to serve the prisoners in this regard. Not only do we serve people in here, but we can serve those out there while we are still in here. Much attention has been given to helping those in prison, but we can be the ones to help. Not only through letters of spiritual and secular advice and encouragement, but many of us are able to sell art, crafts, etc., which we make here and some of us even have funding which we made before we came. We can combine our funding and use it for the same purposes which the Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi Maths and Missions use funding for such as disaster relief, educating the underprivileged, as well as helping with medical care, food, clothing, etc.

Tracy's endeavour is commendable and can motivate other inmates in their path of reformation. This reminds me of some of the inmate brothers imprisoned in different correctional homes in West Bengal.³ Rashendu Chakraborty, Shyamal Khawas, Sailen Banerjee, Sadhan Banerjee, and Kartik Jana along with his wife, all inmates of different correctional homes, came to Belur Math under police escort and took initiation from Swami Gahanananda. Two inmates undergoing rigorous imprisonment at the Raiganj correctional home donated five hundred rupees each for the tsunami relief fund. This was

their savings from their wages—about fifteen rupees per day—that are normally sent to their own families. One inmate brother has become a regular reader of *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly magazine of the Ramakrishna Order. They all are now changed people. Akhtar Hussain and Mehmood Mabud of Bamungram village in Malda district changed themselves from daring robbers to efficient barbers. So is Shibu Das, once a ruffian and the terror of his locality, who took initiation from the president of the Ramakrishna Order and is now an art teacher at the Janashiksha Mandir of the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur. One Muslim inmate of the Malda correctional home prefers not to leave the home, if he is given the option; for some time now he has been giving regular classes on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda to his fellow inmates!

Situation of Prisons and Prisoners

'Every saint has a past, every sinner has a future', stated Oscar Wilde. Nobody is born a criminal. The history of imprisonment as punishment for people committing crime dates to prehistoric days. Imprisonment implies detention of a person who has committed an offence in the eyes of the law and deprivation of his or her liberty by the state. But once behind bars these unfortunate people are usually forgotten as human beings and are rarely treated with the respect and dignity commensurate with their status in pre-imprisonment days. In earlier times convicts were mostly put to death, often in public places, by means that ranged from the novel to the gruesome, or were banished from the country or put to bonded labour. Imprisonment considered as punishment in its own right was gradually accepted from the early eighteenth century, mainly due to growing opposition to the death penalty for all crimes except the most heinous. Banishment from the country was replaced, during the

colonial period of European domination, by transporting them to distant places for a certain period or for life.

The history of prisons reveals that the prison system and the nature of treatment towards prisoners are more or less the same irrespective of time and place. Most of the prisons are still hells on earth—unhygienic, filthy, and deprived of minimum basic living conditions, while the prisoners are looked upon as caged animals whose lives and fates are always at the mercy of jail wardens. Countless human beings throughout history have died unheard, uncared for, and unfed, when not inhumanly tortured. It took an extremely long journey for humanity to consider imprisonment of criminals or offenders as a means for their reformation and not for their punishment only.

In the earlier days of penal reform the emphasis was on solitary confinement, silence, strict discipline, and harsh rules, with the hope that these would help the offender to be penitent. There was no consideration for the welfare of inmates or any provision for their rehabilitation after their release. Gradually, penal reformers like John Howard, Elizabeth Fry, Alexander Maconochie, Jeremy Bentham, and others in England and the US advocated innovative means that included vocational training and industrial employment, intermediate sentences, rewards for good behaviour, and parole or conditional release.

Imprisonment in the criminal justice system has several justifications. Apart from acting as a deterrent to potential criminals, isolating a criminal for a period of time helps protect society from further crime, while criminals have an opportunity to access counselling services, education, and vocational training that would rehabilitate them for a life in society later.

The penal reformation movement in Western countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries gradually transformed the prisons from torture houses to reformation centres. Living conditions and medical care were improved and prisoners were provided with formal and vocational education, which helped their rehabilitation. Swami Vivekananda, prior to joining the Parliament of Religions in 1893, was impressed after visiting one such reformatory, the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women in Sherborn, a small semi-rural town located about eighteen miles west of Boston. In a letter written to his close disciple Alasinga Perumal, he lamented the appalling conditions of prisoners in India in comparison to what he saw in Sherborn. Though today large numbers of such reformatories are functioning in the US—some are more than a century old—unfortunately many have turned into simple prisons.

In India the condition of prisons and prisoners' reformation did not undergo major changes, in spite of several commissions on prison reforms in both the pre- and post-independence era.⁴ A nominal change occurred in West Bengal, where jails have been officially renamed as 'correctional homes'.⁵ The objective of this change of name is to reduce from the minds of prisoners the age-old stigma associated with the term 'jail' and to look at it as an institution in which their distorted minds, tainted by their antisocial lifestyle, are thoroughly rectified through suitable reformation programmes that turn them into useful citizens. This indeed is a long-term and difficult social work that requires a change not only in the mindset of prisoners, who are of heterogeneous types, but also of those associated with prison administration and of the general public as well.

Rehabilitation Activities

At present prison authorities allow and assist various religious and social organizations to participate in the reformation of inmates. These

organizations plan and execute on their own, as an act of social service, different short-term programmes like training in yoga and meditation, music and singing, drama and dance. These activities not only keep participating inmates in good spirit but also contribute to the more elaborate long-term rehabilitation programmes.

The Ramakrishna Mission, apart from its regular social service in the fields of relief and rehabilitation, education, and health care, is now rendering service for the reformation of inmates in correctional homes of West Bengal. From a humble beginning in 2003—the 150th birth anniversary of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi—at the Malda District Correctional Home and with the official permission of the Prison Directorate, Government of West Bengal, the reformation work has now vastly expanded to around forty correctional homes. For the last eight years these activities have been generously supported by devotees and admirers of different branch centres of the Ramakrishna Order.

The activities broadly encompass the following areas:

(i) Assistance to improve inmates' mental and spiritual condition and counselling to avoid negative influences through classes on value education and moral science, celebration of national and religious festivals, annual sports, and so forth.

(ii) Education through: (a) Basic literacy lessons; vocational training in tailoring, carpentry, book-binding, two-wheeler repairing, making incense sticks, candles, fast-food, and other items; computer training; library maintenance; and many such skills. (b) Organization of special lectures on animal husbandry, pisciculture, poultry and dairy development, agriculture, tending goats, and the like. (c) Regular coaching and assistance for examinees of middle, higher secondary, graduation, and post-graduation levels.

(d) Awareness programmes on health issues—TB, leprosy, enteric diseases, snake-bites, and others.

(iii) Welfare activities covering inmates as well as ex-inmates. A good number of ex-inmates have been rehabilitated to normal life. Some of them are now earning their livelihood by tailoring, carpentry, drawing rickshaws, working as barbers, and other jobs with the full financial and material support of the Ramakrishna Mission. For instance, Sri Arun Debnath of Alipore Central Correctional Home has been given a computer and some money, through which he is now running a good business; Sri Madhusudan Mahato has been helped to secure a job at a Sponge Iron factory in Purulia. Free education and accommodation at schools conducted by the Mission were also provided to the children of lifer inmates.

Everybody's Responsibility

The reformation of convicted people is not at all an easy task. The services that are now rendered by some organizations outside the prisons are limited in scope, offer little encouragement, and are extremely insufficient. The administrative, organizational, and financial responsibility of all formal and vocational education and rehabilitation of inmates and ex-inmates must be taken over by the state. Voluntary social and welfare organizations can only help the authorities by framing educational programmes, coaching and guiding student inmates, conducting regular classes on value education and motivational skills, organising events like sports, cultural activities, and the like, and creating awareness in society for a warm acceptance and social recognition of released inmates. It is easy to rechristen 'jails' or 'prisons' as 'correctional homes' or 'reformatories', but rehabilitating prisoners is the real task. For this a paradigm shift should first take place in the policy and planning of prison administration and the related legal system at state and national levels.

The first step is to improve the living conditions in every prison and allied institutions meant for custody, care, treatment, and rehabilitation of offenders. Accommodation, hygiene, sanitation, food, clothing, and medical facilities are some of the areas that demand urgent attention. Along with this, special care has to be taken of all the factors responsible for vitiating the atmosphere of these institutions.

Though the inmate population of an average prison is very diverse in age, religion, caste, education and family background, language, and other factors, more than two-third of the inmates generally come from the poorer sections of society and the majority of them are illiterate. Considering this, major reformation programmes that include long-term formal as well as vocational training, along with value education, should be made mandatory for young offenders, particularly those in the age group 18–25, and they should not be confined in prisons along with adult offenders. There should be separate institutions for them where, in view of their young and impressionable age, they will receive treatment and training suited to their special needs. Programmes for individual offenders have to be individualized after suitable counselling and should aim at providing suitable formal and vocational education, development of work habits and skills, change in attitudes, modification of behaviour, and implantation of social and moral values. Cultural, recreational, and value education programmes are essential for all inmates irrespective of their caste, creed, or religion in order to improve their physical and mental situation.

Major stress has to be given to classes on value education, moral science, yoga, meditation, prayer, and religious studies for long-term serving adult and aged inmates who do not need a job-oriented education. True religion has

immense practical significance in solving the individual and collective problems of our day-to-day life; it is the very basis of our morality, inner strength, courage, and sense of social justice and equality. The majority of inmates, especially those coming from rural and poorer backgrounds, have spontaneous faith in God and religion; they should be encouraged and provided with facilities to perform their religious practices and rituals. Care must be taken to erase any idea of dogmatism and fundamentalism from their minds. They should be trained and encouraged to love and serve their fellow inmates.

The process of reformation and rehabilitation of offenders is an integral part of the total process of social reconstruction. Therefore, the development of prisons has to find a place in national development programmes. The state needs to promote research in the correctional field with a view to find objective inputs that make prison programmes more effective.

Inmates are generally divided into two classes: convicts and under-trials. According to the data and experience of prison officials, around 75 per cent of the inmates are under-trials, of whom 5 to 10 per cent would be convicted in due course and the rest would either be discharged or acquitted.

‘Justice delayed is justice denied.’ The saddest fact is that in most of the cases it is the poor and the weak who become the real victims of the criminal justice system. The poor under-trial usually fails to have sufficient funds for legal aid and for furnishing sufficient security and bond. As a consequence, thousands of under-trial prisoners are imprisoned in different jails of the country for periods longer than the maximum term for which they could have been sentenced, if convicted. Machang Lalung, aged 77 and arrested in 1951, was released from incarceration in July 2005 in Assam after spending fifty-four years behind bars awaiting trial. Lalung had been arrested

at his home village in Silsang under section 326 of the Indian Penal Code for 'causing grievous harm'. According to civil rights groups who have investigated Lalung's case, there was no substantive evidence to support the charges against him. In any event, those found guilty of this offence typically receive sentences of no more than ten years of imprisonment. The National Human Rights Commission has taken up the cases of four other men awaiting trial in Assam: Khalilur Rehman has been in custody for thirty-five years, Anil Kumar Burman for thirty-three, and Sonamani Deb for thirty-two, while Parbati Mallik has been detained in a psychiatric unit for thirty-two years.⁶ In one particular case the Supreme Court of India admitted in 1979 that such detention of under-trials is clearly illegal and is in violation of detainees' fundamental rights guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution of India.⁷

Therefore, why should the under-trial, who has not been sentenced for any crime, be subject to penal treatment? The unnecessary confinement of innocents, victims of circumstances, or suspected as criminal may sometimes severely affect their minds, to the point of making them even more dangerous criminals. This is prone to happen in prisons where under-trials have the opportunity to interact with inmates of real criminal tendencies who attempt to vitiate the minds of other inmates. The state has to evolve proper mechanisms to ensure that no under-trial prisoner is unnecessarily detained. This will be ensured by speeding up trials, by simplifying bail procedures, and by periodic reviews of cases of under-trial prisoners. Under-trial prisoners have to, as far as possible, be confined in separate institutions. The state must provide free legal aid to all needy prisoners.

Each Soul Is Potentially Divine

One serious problem inmates have to face after

being released from prison is the lack of recognition by and acceptance in society. The problem is more acute for literate middle-class offenders than illiterate rural ones. Many a times innocents become victims of circumstances or even convicts, and once released they sometimes become hard core criminals out of anger and hatred towards society.

'Each soul is potentially divine', said Swami Vivekananda. A person who has been released from jail should not be condemned as a branded criminal, because by following a careful rehabilitation programme he or she can be truly reformed, as we have experienced. A warm welcome and the necessary support to lead a normal life are expected from society. If ex-inmates are forced to go back to jail, it is the fault of our society. The reformation and rehabilitation of convicted prisoners is the duty and responsibility of the whole society as well as of the state and prison authorities. We have to work to create social awareness for a wholehearted acceptance of ex-convicts. The various social organizations, the government, and public media can help create mass awareness and social mobilization.

Although emphasis is being given to treating the prisons as reformation centres, in practice prisons are still looked upon by the majority of prison administrative and security personnel as punishment centres. The Indian prison system is the legacy of pre-independence India, which treated criminals and offenders with severe coercion in the name of punishment and correction. And in this regard, the mindset of present prison guardians has changed very little. The unnatural death of inmates has become quite common. Human Rights activists found that in India 7,468 persons—an average of 1,494 persons per year—died in prison and police custody between 2002 to 2007.⁸ Even a few years back there was a dreadful incident of Bihar jail officials pouring

gangajal, acid, into the eyes of prisoners as a way of punishment. In 2010, after being strongly criticized, the government of West Bengal suspended the superintendent and four other employees of one central jail for brutally torturing and compelling nine inmates to parade naked on 23 August 2010.⁹ The cases depicted in a study report entitled *Torture in India 2010*, by the Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi, are vivid enough to shock the feelings of any regular citizen.

To bring about true reformation of convicts, one very important step is to implement appropriate training to all security guards and correctional officers. Apart from the regular training, prison guards and officers should be particularly trained in behavioural aspects like interpersonal relations—communication, motivation, and human psychology, especially criminal psychology—value education, legal restrictions, and other such subjects that will condition them to treat inmates with consideration, care, and empathy, without relaxing the necessary discipline.

The state would do well to encourage voluntary cooperation from non-governmental and religious organizations to develop and implement programmes on an extensive and systematic basis. The government should open avenues for such participation by extending financial and other assistance to voluntary organizations and individuals willing to help prisoners and ex-prisoners. A few NGOs can be encouraged to specialize in the field of prisoners' rehabilitation and thus train workers in correctional welfare. Social studies and courses on prison management and correctional welfare can be developed to create professionals in this field, which will be an asset for both the government and NGOs.

No one can prevent crime in society, but the prevention of offenders from re-offending is possible. After many years of welfare service in correctional homes of West Bengal we strongly

believe that true reformation of offenders and even hard core criminals is a reality, provided they can be guided through well-built correctional programmes based on the suggestions mentioned above. More than a hundred years ago Swami Vivekananda's heart cried for the plight of prisoners in Indian jails, and his concept of man-making education can be a practical way towards correcting prison inmates. Let us all pray to acquire the necessary strength to sail through the rough sea of reformation programmes for our inmate brothers.

*Asato ma sadgamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya,
mrityorma mritam gamaya.*

Lead us from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality. ❧

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India: A Mission Interrupted

Dr Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty

IT IS CLEAR THAT INDIA IS passing through a rough phase, but compared to what the nation underwent for centuries she is no doubt better off today. There is, however, a big difference between the earlier and the present phase: the former almost destroyed her, while the present phase is one of tremendous regeneration on the material and spiritual planes. This story is missed by most people and that is the reason why there is so much negativity and criticism all around. India's regeneration has implications not just for India but for the whole world, as she will assist humankind to remodel itself on the basis of the highest spirituality. Besides, the world will learn to cooperate rather than master and exploit nature, will protect and encourage diversity in

unity, will integrate rather than dissociate all natural and social sciences with ancient thoughts. India will become what it has forgotten to be, the Advaita Ashrama, preaching 'the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and ... in entire sympathy with all other systems,'¹ as visualized by Swami Vivekananda.

The world will learn to establish all its future doctrines and knowledge on the spiritual unity of living beings. It will affirm and enhance life in all its variety by showing the spiritual dimension lurking in everything. The canker that has been steadily growing in the human soul of life-negation, of life-consuming greed, will have to be eradicated. It has resulted in an accelerated extinction of species, erosion of the co-evolutionary interdependence of organic and inorganic communities, shrinking forests, depleting water tables, collapsing fisheries, melting glaciers, and pollution of every kind. Philosophical thought centred on spirituality will provide an island in a world being submerged by the engulfing tide of life lived on a beastly level that seeks beastly means and fulfilment. The nature-nurture imbalance that has been disrupted will then be seen

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as a temporary interlude. The world has to reorganize itself in tune with the ineluctable order of a self-regulating biological hologram. Humans will mentally step out of this speck of dust, called earth, with all its attendant jockeying for position and advantage, to unite with the immeasurably vast universe. They will then comprehend their own immensity and immortality.

The Task before India

There have been and are many studies regarding India's downfall. But on the fundamental level, India had succumbed to forces of life-negation because it moved away from the harmonious pursuit of material and spiritual well-being that it had maintained through successive generations, despite devastating incursions and natural calamities. Instead of emerging out and harvesting its diverse material and human resources, India went into a cocoon and thereby neglected and destroyed its resources. Instead of building on its spiritual reserves of love, compassion, respect, and integrity of all life, which understands the deep structures of existence, it began hating and surrendering to the exploiters. It had, through intellectual penury, identified westernization with modernization and modernization with spirituality. Dazzled with different tools of suppression and governance, it abdicated control of its own destiny to powerful alliances of exploitative groups that cut across social, economic, and national borders.

India has to step back to its continuous village republican tradition to thus step forward, raise its masses, and, as Swamiji said, 'develop their lost individuality' (4.362). This step will result in a true grass-roots democracy of its ethnic, linguistic, and denominational groups that will be bound by shared goals of growth plus equity. Another step forward for the country will have to be the drawing on its vast human capital, to harness natural capital for common prosperity. This forward

movement to fulfil India's innermost goals and utmost possibilities cannot be executed through external agencies or interventions, but through the exertions of its own civil society. And for this step India will have to overcome the widening rift between rural and urban areas as well as create a dynamic continuum between the two.

The intrusion of the enterprising West should reawaken the fervid spirit of Indian enterprise, which in the past joined hands with religion, language, and arts to transform Asian ethos. The corrective to the malaise of the loss of national vigour in India's body, mind, and soul has to be administered from within and not from outside. The first step in applying corrective measures is to recall that we are not cowards fleeing before a revolution, or cloistered in solitary sanctuaries, but gods in chrysalises going to take on chaos and darkness. With Swamiji we must say: 'Black and thick are the folds of sinister fate. But I am the master. I raise my hand, and lo, they vanish! All this is nonsense. And fear? I am the Fear of fear, the Terror of terror, I am the fearless secondless One, I am the Rule of destiny, the Wiper-out of fact. *Shri wah Guru!*' (8.522). The courage of saying no to decadence, corruption, and senescence will focus our efforts and will draw out our individual best for the collective good. The vast moral, intellectual, spiritual, and physical resources of the people will then be tapped and people will be truly empowered to no longer be at the mercy of a handful of sanctimonious charlatans and mountebanks.

India is, therefore, already envisioned. The vision awaits realization, which will come not like manna from heaven, or from a prophet, or a future avatara, but through the effort of every Indian to become a model human being as envisioned by the seers, both ancient and modern. People and communities, the flora and fauna, everything on earth and even the heavens await such a fulfilment. Thus, the flowering of the

fullest potential of humanity will bring about a new type of humanity and society.

For India to really regenerate it has to read its mission forward into the future. This task is made easy because of the paths shown by the lives of great avatars and seers who compressed a million years of human history in their glorious lifetimes; encompassed all space, time, existence, and points of view in their inclusive vision; and lived beyond all hatreds, failures, struggles, and victories. These avatars and seers epitomized humanity's attempts to realize the unity of all existence, to see life as a shadow of death, death as a shadow of immortality, all shades of darkness as changes in light, all truth as relative, approximate, half-way houses to the luminous supernal. India, in carrying forward this mission of its spiritual ambassadors, will then be what she was always known for: a land 'where the highest truths become practical' (2.85).

Opening India

Swamiji says: 'India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word *MLECHCHHA* and stopped communion with others' (5.52). In the emerging knowledge society India will have to resume its ancient role of diffusing its highest aspirations, while at the same time welcoming the world's greatest thoughts. India was one of the cradles of civilization; she never stood in isolation but interacted with other ancient civilizations. People, goods, thoughts constantly flowed between India and other cultures, making all prosper.

India has to adapt the benefits of Western technology, science, wisdom, traditions, and institutions of different regions to its own needs. Thereby, India will recover from the ongoing denudation of its natural habitats, agricultural land, and water and forest resources. On the social side it will learn how to raise its masses through spreading education efficiently and employing the various tested methods of social

My ideal is growth, expansion, development on national lines. As I look back upon the history of my country, I do not find in the whole world another country which has done quite so much for the improvement of the human mind. Therefore I have no words of condemnation for my nation. I tell them, 'You have done well; only try to do better.' Great things have been done in the past in this land, and there is both time and room for greater things to be done yet. I am sure you know that we cannot stand still. If we stand still, we die. We have either to go forward or to go backward. We have either to progress or to degenerate. Our ancestors did great things in the past, but we have to grow into a fuller life and march beyond even their great achievements. How can we now go back and degenerate ourselves? That cannot be; that must not be; going back will lead to national decay and death. Therefore let us go forward and do yet greater things.

—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3:195–6


uplift. In the field of industry and agriculture the most modern methods should be available for India as well. Indians must form part of the global ethics and dynamics of the world economy by learning how to use market forces to create and distribute wealth. This type of adaptation of knowledge will spur the nation to contribute for the benefit of other nations too. More than a hundred years ago Swamiji pointed out: 'Even in politics and sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day. That shows the solidarity' (3.241).

In the past India has acted as the laboratory and workshop for fusing different racial samskaras received through demographic movements from inside and outside. It has also masterfully fused different ethos, bringing them under one common umbrella called Hinduism in modern times. And whenever such an assimilation and fusing of ethos occurred, the inherent strength of the nation was fortified, which resulted in spreading that influence throughout its Asiatic neighbourhood. India's ideas spread to the heart of the Himalayas and to the distant reaches of the continent, because people came to her and returned enriched by their experience, which in turn they shared with their people. From there it spread to other countries like a domino effect. This time India does not have the same demographic elements like before, but it will have to work on the various cultures and thoughts to move once more and recharge and re-fertilize those old tracks and channels with fresh vigour of thought and action. India so envisioned will enrich, strengthen, and revitalize itself and the world through this role.

Future Civilization

Spiritual truths are based on humankind's real nature and this is the highest attainment and form of civilization. Humanity will move from the truth of beings to the truth of the Being and of spiritual freedom. Humankind has to think as a whole rather than as separate tribes, societies, or nations. Conflicts have to be resolved by dialogue and dignity, and no person or group will come to be an island surrounded by a vale of tears. Each person will be, as Swamiji says, 'great in his own place' (1.51).

Each person has a unique destiny through which his or her divinity expresses in a unique way. For this reason we envision a world in which each person will come out of oblivion and meaninglessness and will be recognized for what he

or she is: incarnate divinity. It will be a world in which there will be peace and concord, for people will see, understand, and interact with each other from a deeper level. It will become the Advaita Ashrama, the house where humanity will live in unity and brotherhood. It will be the place for 'the practicalisation of the Eternal Truth—THE ONENESS OF ALL BEINGS' (5.435). 

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Young India

Swami Narasimhananda

GUNJAN VEDA IS a voracious reader. She cannot think of a day without reading. Her work in the Planning Commission of India requires a lot of travelling. Away from her collection of books and libraries, she is deprived of books to match her reading pace. As a solution she founded *www.indiareads.com*, an online library that delivers books to your doorstep. In her early thirties, Gunjan is the face of young India: energetic, enthusiastic, enterprising, innovative, and in charge.

Young and Responsible

The young have always been labelled as irresponsible, immature, and lacking ideals. Growing years and greying hair have always been linked with maturity and wisdom. Old age may bring experience, but it also slows the brain! This conflict of intelligence and experience was aptly

described by Lyman Bryson: 'The error of youth is to believe that intelligence is a substitute for experience, while the error of age is to believe that experience is a substitute for intelligence.'¹ From the state of 'there was nothing I could do and nothing I could say', as in the lines of the popular song 'Young and Foolish' by Arnold B Horwitt, the Indian young have come of age and taken charge.

History shows that great people were always young. Jesus, Shankaracharya, Vivekananda, Einstein, or Alexander—all of them achieved greatness before they turned forty. The Upanishads speak of the young: 'In the prime of life, good, learned, most expeditious, most strongly built, and most energetic.'² That the young count is known but, what is so special about the Indian youth? They are the pilots of the development story of a nation with a chequered history of more than sixty years of independence. When speaking of Indian youth one can say 'Young India', or better still 'India is Young', because according to the 2001 Indian census, more than 69 per cent of

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Indians were less than 34 years old.³ India's population has become younger only in the last decade. Demographically speaking, India is the youngest country in the world. Any discussion or development plan for India should take into account this major chunk of its population.

Before understanding the psyche of Indian youth, it will help to understand what being young is like. What is the concept of youth? Who is young? Does it depend solely on age or are there other indicators? Youth is generally categorised as a non-adult phase of life, a phase of growth, and the young are supposed to be still growing, incapable of handling the mature decisions of life by themselves. They are seen as babies sitting in cosy strollers having a peek into the garden of life. However comforting this categorization of the young may be to the old guardians of society, it is too simplistic and inaccurate. Youth is not a rigid concept but a very fluid one. The age of the phases of childhood, adolescence, youth, and adulthood vary from person to person. It also depends on social and cultural backgrounds. While adulthood takes its sweet time to appear in the life of the pampered child of a wealthy parent, it encroaches upon the childhood of the child of the pavement-dweller. One is reminded of Swami Vivekananda's letter: 'The Chinese child is quite a philosopher and calmly goes to work at an age when your Indian boy can hardly crawl on all fours. He has learnt the philosophy of necessity too well.'⁴ Poverty drove the Chinese child to learn the 'philosophy of necessity'. The Indian youth too has been driven to a faster stepping into adulthood by poverty and changing demographics.

Recent studies affirm that youth is a concept not dependent on biological age alone:

Age is a concept which is assumed to refer to a biological reality. However, the meaning and the experience of age, and of the process of

ageing, is subject to historical and cultural processes. Although each person's life span can be measured 'objectively' by the passing of time, cultural understandings about life stages give the process of growing up, and of ageing, its social meaning. Specific social and political processes provide the frame within which cultural meanings are developed. Both youth and childhood have had and continue to have different meanings depending on young people's social, cultural and political circumstances.⁵

If the Indian youth was immature and not ready for real life, the country would have been in chaos and would have come to a standstill, with more than 70 per cent of its population in such a state. A tourist coming to India gets to see only young faces all the time. From the cab driver at the airport to the staff at the hotel, from tour guides at historical monuments to the antique shop-keeper, it is young faces everywhere. Sometimes the tourist finds it difficult to find old people.

Many business houses in India are headed by women and men under thirty. Some of them were born into great business families like Devita Saraf of Vu Televisions, Lakshmi Venu of Sundaram Clayton, Sindhuja Rajaraman of Seppan, and Alok Kejriwal of Contests2win. Others have built successful business stories from scratch like Phanindra Sarma of Redbus, Sachin Bansal and Binny Bansal of Flipkart, Suhas Gopinath of Globals, Ashwin Ramesh of DailySEOblog, Rajkumar Koneru of Indiainfo, and Sunil Dutt Jha of iCMG. The list seems endless. Even in government and public sector undertakings, youth is at the helm of affairs. Indian politics too has a good share of young faces, with some of them even finding a place in the parliament.

Indian Youth's Psyche

Therefore, the young in India are in charge. But, what is their psyche? What is their lifestyle? A

recent account of their lifestyle is not very encouraging: 'Welcome to the lifestyles of the young and the restless where the day never ends, just melts into one another. It starts at 9 a.m. with a hasty toothbrush and continues till well past midnight with a drag of a cigarette. For the average working youngster, this is routine. Add to that the consumption of junk food, smoking, and alcohol—the youth are happily and unabashedly ruining their health, albeit unconsciously. Not surprisingly, lifestyle diseases are on the rise.'⁶ Though this may be the lifestyle of the urban youth, the rural youth has a different story. To toil or to study to ensure a comfortable future, the semi-urban and rural youth has to work hard and travel long distances. Here too 'the day never ends', but instead of melting, it seems to drag from one problem to another, from one dream to another—dreams that are uncertain of becoming a reality, but are the only solace in an otherwise drab existence. Some thought leads to the conclusion that Indian youth—urban, semi-urban, and rural—have acquired their psyche from their parents.

Who are the parents of the present-day Indian youth? They were born between the 1950s and 1960s in the infant independent India. New vistas were opening up and people were experimenting with new careers, away from the traditional mindset and established archetypes. This entailed migrations from the rural to the urban, from homeland to new places even outside the country. The joint family system was breaking up and so were the values and customs that went with it. It was to the parents of this era that today's youth were born. Indian children are seldom sent to grooming schools, and Indian family values and traditions were always handed down by grannies and grandpas. With none of them around and with both the parents working or striving hard to ensure a better life for their offspring, the children were not given indigenous grooming lessons. All

they got was 'moral values' from an education system that was and still is, to a great extent, a colonial remnant that apes Western cultures and remains dissociated from the Indian ethos. This has led to a situation where while the Indian youth is conversant with *Mills and Boon*, *Tintin*, *Asterix*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Harry Potter*, it is predominantly clueless about *Kathasaritsagara*, *Hitopadesha*, and *Panchatantra* and does not know much of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata beyond the version made popular by television.

In many senses Indian youth have spent their childhood away from their native place. A significant number of them are not comfortable with their mother-tongue and all they know of their traditional customs, beliefs, and culture is what little they acquired during annual vacation trips to their 'native-place', at the end of which they brought some keepsakes, less to cherish than to flaunt them to their friends. However, it is not that Indian youth do not want to know their tradition; they do want, as the huge demand for courses on Indian culture among youth evince. Compared to the youth of other nations Indian youth have a greater leaning towards their social mores. A recent study reveals: 'The family remains a key institution in the life-world of Indian youth. One could perhaps argue that even in a situation of expanded choice, youth in India, in contrast to the situation ... where conservative mores were regarded as a function of limited opportunity, would freely adopt conservative mores.'⁷ But brought up in a setting where such values were not practised much, knowing the culture could be an intellectual curiosity instead of a priority.

Another development that significantly affects Indian youth's psyche is the seemingly innumerable options available to them in terms of disciplines of study, careers to pursue, places to settle in, and also a more stable society supporting changes in career later in life. Their parents

have struggled hard to create a better world for them and have unwittingly made them unaware of the value of what they have got. An Indian mother laments:

Our generation were told we'd have to wait patiently for rewards ... whatever those would turn out to be. Work hard for the exams. Slog away, swot, swot, swot. Compete like crazy. Await results! Phew! First class in hand, work some more. Swot some more. Apply for a 'decent' job. Keep your fingers crossed. Land the job. Continue slaving. Wait for promotion. Keep slogging. Spend fifteen years or more in the same job. ... But that's not how it works today. Kids want it all. And they want it *now*. And they don't all want to work that hard, either. It's about having 'chill time', 'personal time', a 'life plan' that includes frequent holidays. Kids want to 'hang'. And they want to 'connect'. Mainly over the net. No personal contact—or very little. No emotional investment. Or very little. Just lots of stimulation and virtual relationships that include virtual gifts.⁸

Society not only gives innumerable choices to the youth but also allows them to choose any number of methods of consumption or enjoyment, making them as permissive as possible. What Swami Ranganathananda said about societies outside India four decades ago is relevant to India today:

Children need loving parents at home. How can your children grow and unfold your possibilities without the love of a father and a mother and a peaceful home? But permissive societies and peaceful homes cannot co-exist. We must choose either the one or the other. In a permissive environment, children suffer psychic and personality privations and distortions, and the same children grow up and continue to deepen that malady of permissiveness, until the society becomes sick, and it decays and dies. ... Sheer pursuit of unchecked individual

pleasure uninspired by any standard of ethical and moral values, lowers the quality of human life and human tastes, step by step, and brings about the ruin of a family, the ruin of a society, the ruin of a whole civilization.⁹

This permissiveness affects the mental and social health of the youth, who lose their ability to adapt to a resource-constrained environment.

Social Impact


Easy accessibility to various choices of life has led to a restless behaviour among youth. With advances in technology bringing means of pleasure close at hand, the youth become restive if they cannot access anything they want. Instant gratification has led to instant frustration. Patience, calm, and composure are soon becoming qualities found only in books. To make matters worse, the social system prepares the youth only for expecting and handling success, but not for handling failure. An increasing number of youth suicides bear testimony to the near absence of tolerance levels.

Nevertheless, all is not bad with the Indian youth. While restlessness has brought about an increase in violence and substance abuse, a considerable number of the young are socially active and influence major social and political changes. Apart from the enormous political participation unseen in other countries, Indian youth have always been key social activists, as witnessed in the protests against the laxity of justice in the insane murder of Jessica Lall and the crusade against the insurmountable evil of corruption. These movements involved the entire nation, and the youth of rural and urban India came together and raised their voice, taking full advantage of print and electronic media. This is representative of the extent of influence the youth can bring on society by using the same technological advances that wrongly used bring about unrest. That said,

the youth needs to have much more involvement in national matters. Patriotism is a dying virtue nowadays. A popular writer puts it this way: 'The young Indian is confused. But not angry. Angry enough, that is. Nobody reacts to atrocities any longer. One Jessica Lall murder investigation does not indicate change. By and large, there is widespread indifference in place of indignation.'¹⁰

Some youth are indeed angry, though they prefer to show their anger in positive ways. The last decade has seen the emergence of various small and big youth leaders and icons in the country. To encourage such leadership qualities various organizations have instituted awards for social involvement and leadership of the youth. The Times of India Lead India Campaign and IBN Young Indian Leader Awards are two such. Some awardees are good examples of the factors of social change the young can effect. Take the case of Chavi Rajawat for instance, who being a 'graduate from Delhi's Lady Shriram College and an MBA from IIMM, Pune, ... has worked with several corporate houses before she decided to join grassroots politics'¹¹ and is 'leaving behind the glamorous corporate world and the city arclights to head back to her village Soda in Rajasthan as its sarpanch' (ibid).

The mind of the Indian youth is fresh and open. All they want is progress, and a comfortable one at that. They have been caught up in the sudden increase of pace of the country's development. While India was overwhelmed with local concerns a decade ago, today media and technology have flooded the popular minds with matters both local and global. Being a majority, Indian youth feel responsible, directly or indirectly, for the lack of even basic amenities for the countless in the country. They want to help, but their anxieties and aspirations are way too many, and the time and resources at hand too few. Only a synergy of thoughtful policies effectively

implemented through youth power can lead to a smooth sailing of the nation, a sailing that includes young people at the stern. Though shifts in social and cultural framework have brought serious aberrations in their psyche, a little effort at attitudinal reorientation will still bring marvellous results, as they have tremendous energy waiting to be channelized. Swami Vivekananda said: 'I have faith in my country, and especially in the youth of my country.'¹² Though the prospects of Indian youth seem promising, it remains to be seen if they can vindicate Swamiji's faith. 

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Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta as the Emerging Mimamsa

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

‘SRI RAMAKRISHNA,’ says Martin Barnett, senior editor of *Parabola*, the fascinating journal of myth, tradition, and the search for meaning, ‘left behind a legacy of spiritual authenticity which hasn’t been excelled in the tradition of East and West since.’¹ Authenticity

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and East-West traditions constitute, in fact, the triad of bases for interpreting the profound significance of Sri Ramakrishna’s advent as marking the emergence of a contemporary Mimamsa². And, presumably, this Mimamsa could be what is appropriate to myth, religion, tradition, and their meaning for a multicultural, plural ethos: an inclusive hermeneutics, in short. Since it is an ‘unexamined legacy,’ it remains to examine in what way this excellence is unequalled.

Fusion of Horizons

Umberto Eco, himself a remarkable explorer of

this area, made a helpful suggestion: 'One way of understanding philosophical concepts is often to come back to the common sense of dictionaries.'³ One such dictionary is by Katie Wales.⁴ In her handbook on stylistics there is a very helpful entry. She says that 'traditionally hermeneutics has been concerned with "correct" textual interpretation of the scripture and patristic writings of the early Christian church; later, it covered legal and, also, literary texts; example, poetic allegory. Nowadays, however, hermeneutics has a broader, more philosophical base and, also, relates to psychology and scientific methodology.' The pioneers are German-speaking scholars like Friedrich Schiëmacher (1768–1824) and William Dilthey (1833–1911).

Basically, hermeneutics, as perceived by those scholars, 'represents the dynamic process of interpretation in terms of a continual interplay of interpreter and text, of whole context and individual parts.' This is presumably the 'hermeneutical circle.' Katie Wales further suggests that 'the historical nature of understanding ... has important implications.' And 'the text as it seems to beckon towards us, be relevant to our age, at the same time, we must have necessity to the earlier period; the historical horizon is both present and absent and, our understanding involves a dialogue between past and present, between the original and accrued meaning.' In short, 'an act of understanding is ... a fusion of one's own horizon with the historical one with no clear boundaries between.' This is the 'fusion of horizons.' Whether it is Gadamer or Husserl, or any other interpreter, this fusion is an inevitable—indeed, the primary—strategy of any interpretation. Perhaps this is *sambandha*, connection, one of the aspects of the Indic exegetical quartet of textual interpretation called *anubandha chatushtaya*.

One recalls Sri Ramakrishna's image of a coin of a past currency as valueless in the context of

the economic symbols of a later period. The currency of the Nizam has value as a fascinating curio, but it is invalid as currency now. Yet, there is fusion of the basic idea of currency, money, as a medium of exchange—strictly functional with no intrinsic value. Its 'accrued' meaning over the years suggests its vital significance in discourses of far-ranging effect for social transactions of various hues. But then, the original function of the concerned object and the attitude towards it is almost eclipsed. For instance, stacks of currency notes hoarded in illegal ways have only value connected with the pleasure of sheer possession. They become almost scriptural equivalents to the earlier invaluable religious texts. Therefore, the Goddess Mahalakshmi has now an 'accrued meaning.' This is a phenomenon that led Sri Ramakrishna to crystallize its correlates as 'woman and gold' or 'lust and greed.' In short, the interpretative tools are now a different Mimamsa, the Sri Ramakrishna Mimamsa.

In another perspective, the fusion of horizons also involves the current postmodernist canon of *deferral*. Katie Wales says hermeneutics is 'foreground interpretation negatively, in that all those units whose function is to delay INFORMATION to the reader, to pose questions and ENIGMAS, to delay answers and questions.' Perhaps every equation of interpretation is inconclusive, if not perennially open. But then one has to connect, and this is found in Sri Ramakrishna Vedanta and its implicit or explicit Mimamsa. It is the *amritasya sethu*, bridge to immortality, with its own pathways of to and fro.

Mimamsa Explained

We have to 'go back' to the origins of hermeneutics: scriptures and patristic writings. How does this apply or explain the modern scripture the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*? This is the root text of the Ramakrishna movement. But if 'scripture'

has lost its textual centrality of cultures, why give the status of a scripture to this *Gospel*? Swami Bhajanananda, one of the insightful exponents of the Ramakrishna tradition, gives us an extremely suggestive answer: 'Every great religion has its own scripture and there are several scriptures already existing in the world—Veda, Avesta, Tripitaka, Bible, Quran. Do we need one more? Yes, precisely because there are several scriptures we need just one more to show the validity of every one of them and to establish their overall harmony. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* compiled by Sri M. serves this purpose admirably well.'⁵

The resilience of the scriptural origins of the hermeneutical act—this is as Rita D Sherma puts it with disarming simplicity 'understanding the general ground of understanding itself'⁶—is gloriously and effectively exemplified in and by emergence of a comprehensive text that remaining a scripture yet brings into play *almost* every genre of Indian textual tradition. Its spiritual scriptural centre is the word of God, which crosses its thresholds to link itself with the other integral colours of the spectrum of entire life. Its origins conform to those of the Vedic texts, though it is rooted in recent history. Everything that marks its emergence is *authentic*, and its amenability to rigorous canons of recording is described as reflecting stenographic accuracy—M himself, a student of law among other disciples, gives us the evidences that helped him record the text as authentic words of the Great Master. This is the *Gospel*.

In the Indic textual traditions, besides Shruti and Smriti, we have Itihasa, Kavya, Purana, Katha, and other genres. The interpretation of these texts from various angles—language, structure, content, impact, and so forth—constitutes the hermeneutical acts of Mimamsa. There are texts that have no authors, but texts by authors specific to the genre concerned constitute

together the quantum of texts to be interpreted. Moreover, classical Mimamsa, as it appears in the Brahmanas, was an exercise in logic. However, there is another view advanced, recently and notably, by Sri Aurobindo and Anirvan. Anirvan's view unties the exegetical knot of logic in Mimamsa. He says: 'The word *mīmāṃsa* which is of more frequent occurrence in the Brāhmaṇas than in the Upaniṣads does not, however, imply a strictly logical process. It is more of the nature of a co-ordination of spiritual experiences, or of thoughts having an inner certitude, and is thus more akin to the spiritual practice or *manana* than to the logical procedure of *tarka*. And this is quite in keeping with the prevalent spirit of Mantra cult.'⁷

Then, the obvious doubt: Is Mimamsa and its antiquity merely some experiences of seers that are not amenable to or in tune with the *logic* of interpretation? Anirvan gives a very valuable insight: 'If we carefully study the psychology of spiritual expression (*vāc*), as it has been revealed to numerous Vedic *mantras* which, with a rich array of technical terms, have delicately portrayed the mind's venture into the Unknown, we have no doubt left as to the antiquity of *mīmāṃsa* as a form of intense meditation creating a tradition of mystic knowledge, which must have been orally handed down from father to son or from teacher to disciple' (ibid.). Moreover, Anirvan adds that 'the word [*mimamsa*] and its derivation occur only four times in the Upaniṣads and in connection with the three important concepts of Ātman, Brahman and Ānanda' (ibid.). Sri Ramakrishna is, so to say, an adept in explaining all the three, but privileges *ananda* as the building brick of the world! The world is *majar kuthi*, a mansion of mirth! In fact, the *Gospel* is an exquisite and exhilarating journey, a personal odyssey into joy! *Ananda* is its nucleus as also its exegetical horizon.

Scriptural Basis

The enormous corpus of texts in the original, and notably English translations, published by the Ramakrishna Order is, in a remarkable way, the supportive textual tradition. If the *Gospel* and *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* refer to classical scriptural, literary, or other texts, their English versions are, by and large, available and published by the Ramakrishna Order itself. Indeed, few people notice the enormous range of scriptural and other texts that have come in the wake of the advent of the Great Master. Every month the Order's journals *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Vedanta Kesari* open with a mostly scriptural passage generally in the original Sanskrit version along with its English translation; the rest follows after this invocation so to say. One could consider them as the supportive tradition of texts enriching the hermeneutical canon of Sri Ramakrishna Mimamsa. This is reflective in the way in which Sri Ramakrishna's insights are frequently used as 'illuminators' of quite a few *sabda-jalam maharanyas*, net of words like great forests. Therefore, the root text *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* is an *Anandadayaka Aranyaka*, Upanishad that confers bliss, with both Panchavati and Kali-nagara as alternate rhythms! In fact, the centrality of Dakshineswar in the sacred geography of Kali's 'City of Joy' needs sustained study.

In analysing these implications one has to be very cautious, because some recent studies of the *Gospel* cut their research teeth on this text, but in the process emerge slashing their tongues. The reasons are many, and the hermeneutics of suspicion is a hydra-headed monster that has its own pythonic grip on the so-called original approaches to the *Gospel*. This risk is almost inevitable, though also imminently predictable. Alongside, there are studies that broke new ground in harmonizing through careful comparison. These

include explorations of Sri Ramakrishna and Christ, Sri Ramakrishna's devotional path and Sufism, as also scholarly approaches to what is called 'process theology' involving a comparison between the Great Master and Alfred Whitehead. Indeed, the study of Sri Ramakrishna is so inexhaustible that like the celestial Pushpaka, the flying chariot of the gods, it always has a place vacant for further flights of hermeneutics.

How come the unstudied utterances give rise to such a keen, though, alas, often misleading, response? This is where one gets stuck; but one has to go ahead. The secondary corpus of supportive and other texts could be categorized as a genre that owes its genesis to the work of the Ramakrishna-inspired scholars, both lay and monastic. The first category consists of primary texts on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, either recorded verbatim or recalled and interpreted before they took the written format. These are authentic first-hand accounts, the crown-jewels: the *Gospel* followed by *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*. This category includes the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples as well. The second category are those on the same themes but with wider historical and other aspects playing a vital role in 'placing' the Great Master in the canon and his consequent contributions, both specific and universal. The third category is, as it were, the texts that form the religious and philosophical bases of primarily Hinduism but, often, vis-à-vis other religions. One can use the traditional name of *prasthanatraya*—the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, and the *Brahma Sutra*. Commentaries from the three Acharayas on these texts—translated and interpreted from traditional materials—are inspired by Sri Ramakrishna and put out by the Order. There are also remarkable expositions of bhakti, jnana, karma, and raja yogas. The sutra-structured texts of bhakti and raja yoga, by Narada and

Patanjali respectively, are interpreted without the terse classical *vyakhyanas*, explanations, but in terms of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples. The fourth category consists of hymnal literature composed mainly on the Holy Trio, which are now woven into the fabric of daily worship and prayers that follow a regular time sequence—these are composed mostly by the direct disciples. Finally, and only tentatively final, we have those monumental volumes of the *Cultural Heritage of India*, which steer clear of many of the cerebral fetishes that are bandied about in the name of ‘objective’ scholarship.

This corpus, in fact, affords invaluable glimpses of how Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his own life the basic truths those scriptures gave linguistic expression to. Therefore, whenever an aspect, for instance of sadhana, needs to be placed, Sri Ramakrishna is the contemporary, so to say, confirmatory sourcebook. It is interesting that Sri Ramakrishna’s life attracts the narrative genre too; for instance, Sudhir Kakar, the noted psychoanalyst, wrote a novel entitled *Ecstasy* (Penguin, 2001). Kakar is also the author of *The Mystic and the Analyst* (Penguin, 1992), exploring the Great Master’s life.

To give an example of the help traditional texts offer: Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings hinge on, mainly, the discourse of ‘desire’ with the focal point as ‘lust and greed’—or *kamini-kanchana*. We find this dialectic figuring in the classic *Nyaya-Vaisheshika* text *Bhasha Pariccheda* of Vishvanatha Nyaya-Panchanana’s seventeenth-century Sanskrit text—it was translated into English by Swami Madhavananda. Interestingly, the chapter is entitled ‘Pleasure, Pain, Desire and Aversion’. And pleasure is defined as ‘what is covetable to the whole world. It is produced by merit. Pain is produced by demerit. It is repugnant to all sentient beings.’ And ‘the desire for painlessness and pleasure arises only from

the knowledge of them, while there is desire for their means if there is the notion that they are means to what is desirable.’⁸ Yes, there are means to the end of *kamini-kanchana*, woman and gold. Once these *upamanas*, comparisons, are kept in view the dialectic abstraction is annulled and we stub our toes on the concretions of desire fulfilment—the insatiable nature of desire is communicated by the Great Master through the typical nature of the camel, which, though blood continues to ooze from its mouth while eating thorns, does not stop eating!

There is also another sourcebook that is invaluable in understanding the amazing enormity of the linguistic and several evocative aspects of the *Gospel*. This is the stupendous *Concordance to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.⁹ It not only identifies the staggering range of themes in the *Gospel*, it also shows the various connotations of a word or a context so that one realizes the fascinating interplay of meanings in the discourses of Sri Ramakrishna’s divine play.

Kama, if not *kamini*, is also a crucial aspect of Mimamsa interpretation. Kapil Kapoor, in his invaluable and pioneering study of Indian interpretation of texts,¹⁰ points out that texts were considered as *Kalpataru*, intention-fulfilling tree, and *Kamadhenu*, wish-fulfilling [celestial] cow. *Kalpa* is also *sankalpa*, overpowering intention or conviction, which directs thought, emotion, and will to the desired object. Moreover, there is Goddess Kameshwari, the divine mother who grants desires—the legitimate ones as also the apparent desires. For, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it forcefully: ‘Wicked people are needed too.’¹¹

One can link up this theme with the *Utpatti Vidhis* and the *Naimittika* or *Kamya Vidhis* in the scriptures. K L Sarkar, in his Tagore Law Lectures of 1909 draws attention to the interesting debate about women’s property rights. One

side holds the view that men have the property rights and can spend them as they like. Women's property, if any, belongs to the husbands. The other group declares: 'Women possess the *desire* and the capacity to perform *Yagnas* equally with men. Women have control over money and men require their sanction to make gifts.'¹²

J J Shukla says that 'among the most important rules governing meaning of words' there is one that holds 'that in many Cases words signifying one gender include another, i.e., words signifying masculine include feminine. In Purva Mimamsa it is also said that in some matters attention should be given to the gender and number of words and they should be taken in their proper meanings accordingly.'¹³ Thus, Sri Ramakrishna's 'woman and gold' is not a pejorative hegemonic equation.

From this one can infer two related aspects in Sri Ramakrishna Mimamsa. One is tracing the Kalpataru Day, and the other is the subtle reversal of 'woman' as negative to its implicit revelatory epistemic category of 'maya'. The Kalpataru Day is seen as instinct with several levels of significance, including 'freedom from fear'. Or, rather inclusive of fears generated in the *bhadraloka*, gentlemen, by the emerging colonial regime. Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples are part of recorded history, and the Kalpataru Day re-enacts the recurring cosmic phenomenon in the language of hermeneutics, a 'fusion of horizons'. Moreover, there is also the intriguing fact that this revelation came in the very period the Great Master was fatally ill with what in these days we call 'the emperor of maladies'—cancer. Does it signify that the power that manifested through him is exemplifying the truth that afflictions—even for one like the Great Master—are inviolate in the dualities of the world, even as health and well-being are? And this could explain what Sri Ramakrishna calls 'the love body': 'In the course

of spiritual discipline one gets a "love body", endowed with "love eyes", "love ears", and so on. One sees God with those "love eyes". One hears the voice of God with those "love ears".'¹⁴

Similarly, Sri Ramakrishna gives the concrete symbols of 'woman and gold' the dialectical structure of the subtlest of Indian insights: *maya*. It comes in this way: when Sri Ramakrishna asks M about his wife, M answers: 'She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.' Pat comes the Master's rejoinder: 'And you are a man of knowledge!' (80). The word Sri Ramakrishna used for knowledge is *vidya*, and categorizes *maya* as *vidyamaya* and *avidyamaya*. Sri Ramakrishna asks M about his wife using the word *avidya*: 'Has she spiritual attitudes or is she under the power of *avidya*?' (ibid.). 'Woman and gold', in these terms, assumes the contours of a power, an energy that is neutral and can be channelled in any way one likes.

Behind the *vidya* and *avidya* insight lies, hermeneutically, a whole hinterland of Indian philosophical perceptions. In a study by Valdimir P Ivanov on *vidya* and *avidya* in Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* we notice this duality in Sankhya and Yoga as 'absence of the true knowledge of the qualitative difference between *purusha* and *prakriti* ... in Nyaya (the corresponding term in this system is *mithyajnana*) and Vaisheshika *avidya* is the absence of knowledge of *padartha*-s. ... In Vedanta, *avidya* (linked with the ontological concept of *maya*) could be interpreted as the absence of the true spiritual knowledge of the identity of *atman* and *Brahman*'.¹⁵ Another insight which is in tune with Ramakrishna Vedanta is from Bhartrihari again: 'The discrete representation of the world ... in reality describes *avidya* only. *Vidya*, in its turn, transcends any tradition and conceptualization and is obtained somehow differently' (ibid.). Perhaps, this echoes or corresponds to the Master's *vijnana*.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that *granthas*, books, are *granthis*, knots, which bind one—to the letter, not to the spirit. Then, how do we place the *Kathamrita* and the *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in the context of arriving at these root texts as sources for Sri Ramakrishna Mimamsa? Is it a simple traditional kind of scripture adhering to the format, the contents, and in fact the heritage of such texts, either oral or composed deliberately by an author? Moreover, there are two texts: the one in Bengali and its rendition into English—and of course into other Indian and non-Indian languages. Which is authentic? The question of authenticity is important because there are scholars who go to the *Kathamrita* by getting to know Bengali, and find what they declare as anomalies between the original text and the translated one. They raise the contentious issue of chronology and ellipses. This is the hermeneutics of suspicion, which in this case validates the category of texts as ‘knots’. They are, in Sri Ramakrishna’s own idiom, people who have a computational sensibility that displaces the sensitivity of enjoying the mangoes when you see them—though they have their uses.

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

1. Martin Barnett, ‘Seeking the Transcendent’, *Parabola*, issue on ‘Ecstasy’ (Summer 1948), 48.
2. Mimamsa: Profound thought or reflection or consideration, investigation, examination, discussion; theory, ‘examination of the Vedic text’; name of one of the three great divisions of orthodox Hindu philosophy, divided into two systems: the Purva-mimamsa or Karma-mimamsa by Jaimini, concerning chiefly with the correct interpretation of Vedic ritual and text, and usually called Mimamsa, and the Uttara-mimamsa or Brahma-mimamsa or Sariraka-mimamsa by Badarayana, commonly styled Vedanta, and dealing chiefly with the nature of Brahman or the one universal Spirit—see M Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 818.
3. Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 26.
4. Katie Wales, *A Handbook of Stylistics* (London: Longman, 1990), 116–17.
5. Swami Bhajanananda, ‘The Scripture of the Future’, *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita—Centenary Volume*, ed. D P Gupta and D K Sengupta (Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 1982), 85.
6. Rita D Sherma, ‘Introduction’, *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Towards a Fusion of Horizons*, ed. Rita Sherma and Arvind Sharma (New Delhi: Springer, 2008), 2. This is an invaluable source book. For the notion of understanding see also Chinmoy Goswami, ‘Understanding the Story of Understanding’, *Language and Interpretation: Hermeneutics from East-West Perspective*, ed. Manjula Ghosh and Raghunath Ghosh (New Delhi: Northern Book Center, 2007), 56–65.
7. Sri Anirvan, *Buddhiyoga of the Gītā and other Essays* (Madras: Samata Books, 1991), 84–5.
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12. K L Sarkar, *Mimamsa Rules of Interpretation*, ed. Justice Markandeya Katju (New Delhi: Modern Law, 2008), 159.
13. J J Shukla, *Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Ahmedabad: Karnvati, 1998), 13.
14. *Gospel*, 115.
15. Vladimir P Ivanov, ‘Vidya and Avidya in Bhartrihari’s *Vakyapadiya*’, *Bhartrihari: Language, Thought and Reality*, ed. Mithilesh Chaturvedi (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 254.



People's Power vs Political Power

T S Krishna Murthy

OVER THE LAST YEAR we have been reading reports of people protesting against authoritarian rule in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. Similar protests have also taken place in the twentieth century in Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as in African countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Congo, and Zimbabwe, to name a few. Asian countries too have been experiencing this phenomenon. In India, under the pacesetter Anna Hazare, we have also recently witnessed people coming out in large numbers on the streets of

various cities to support his movement against increasing corruption. The recent 'occupy Wall Street' protests in the US, along with protests in Europe due to financial crises, are other examples of mass people demonstrations.

The Restless Populace

History records many instances where authoritarian rule has often met with a tragic end. In England Oliver Cromwell rose up in protest against the British monarchy because of the autocratic rule of King Charles I, which resulted in the beheading of the monarch. Similarly, in France, Germany, and Italy people rose up against the dictatorial rule of their leaders at various stages of their respective histories. In the early twentieth century there was a Russian

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revolution against the monarchy led by people like Lenin and Stalin. In most of the countries the protest against the rulers started as a small movement and gained strength depending upon the seriousness of the issues involved and the mood of the people. As it gained strength, it resulted in violence in many countries. The experience of France during the regime of Louis XIV and the more recent movements in the Middle East are cases in point. Ironically, the very leaders of the people's revolt, once in power, in some cases, became in course of time alienated from the people they led, and the people found themselves suffering under autocratic rule once again.

Most modern leaders do not seem to realize that their political power can be sustained only when it is fully backed by the people's power. Often these elected representatives are keen to promote their selfish interests or the interests of their respective political parties rather than promoting and protecting the national interest. As a result, these elected representatives tend to become dictatorial and authoritarian, ignoring the sentiments and aspirations of the people, thereby contributing to a lack of trust in the democratic processes, if not in the collapse of democracy. It is, therefore, not surprising that many of the disappointed people in such circumstances take to violence. One may refer to Maoist or Naxalite violence in India, which is gradually spreading in different states due to the failure of the legislature to meet the local aspirations for development and good governance.

Nature has a fine balance and sees that no particular species dominates for long. Similarly, no one class of people can dominate or exploit the rest for long; sooner or later the downtrodden will revolt and topple those in power. The centre of power in every society is never static,

it constantly keeps changing, and this is what makes society recycle its human and other resources for its survival. Any society that does not undergo this kind of periodic upheaval becomes weak and fossilized to fall easy prey to outsiders.

History has witnessed conflicts not only against political powers, but also when people are divided on some issues and clash against each other igniting a civil war. Civil unrest is found in many countries; it is a form of soft civil war. People are never united for long, and to think that the system of democracy will unite them is an illusion. In many cases it was democracy or its wrong application that divided people. Such destabilization is sometimes fuelled by foreign democratic powers that, for their own convenience or safety, want social unrest in particular countries to continue.

History has also often shown that the decision by the majority or the people's will was found to be wrong. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The voice of the majority is wrong, seeing that they govern and make a sad state of the world.'¹ And if one has to take every shade of opinion, then there will always be compromises, which has been the bane of every democratic system.

Democracy

Democracy is meant to be the people's rule for their liberty and welfare. It comes from two words *demos*, people, and *kratos*, rule. Democracy, like society, is not static; it continues to evolve over a period of time depending upon local conditions. That is why democracy has taken many forms down the centuries. Democracy has to be understood as a means and not an end in itself. At best it is an instrument in which the will of the people obtains expression through periodic elections that determine the fate of those very people. In practical terms,

modern democracy has come to mean a government based on majority rule. The leaders acquire political power and strength because of the people's power vested in them through elections. Often the persons who are elected to form the government are under the impression that they represent the will of the people. What history teaches us, however, is that political power exercised by the rulers is not to be equated with the people's power.

Unfortunately, in many countries the elected representatives do not represent the majority will of the people, as they are often elected under a limited mandate, thereby representing a limited section of the population. This is mainly because of the deficiencies in the electoral system. Moreover, the elected representatives in the modern legislatures have very little time to present the views of their constituents in the legislature. Thus, the governments based on the principles of modern representative democracy cannot be said to be meeting the definition of democracy as stated by Abraham Lincoln in his famous Gettysburg Address: 'Government of the people, by the people, and for the people.'

In places where the unit of democracy is small, for instance in a city-state, democracy is not liable to much distortion; but in a country like India, where the *demos* are so diverse and the needs of a particular part of the country are different from another, the ideal of democracy is severely challenged. The spread of education, employment, leisure, health, and other factors are not evenly distributed. The system of communism that tries to rectify such disparities has failed and over time became repressive, killing those it is supposed to help. When India pressed for a universal democracy after independence the world laughed, for Indians were not ready for such a system. Through many struggles, however, India's is the largest

democracy in the world today and is serving as an object lesson for others.

Enlightened Democracy

Although democracy may not be the best form of government, it can be agreed that it is the least harmful. Democracy may vary in its forms depending upon local culture and history, and its success depends upon leadership and good governance. In order to be effective and acceptable, it always has to work for the larger common good. It requires constant participation with eternal vigilance on the part of all citizens. John Stuart Mill, a famous British political thinker observed: 'The first element of good governance, therefore, being the virtue and intelligence of human beings composing the community, the most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess, is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves.'²

We can therefore conclude that people's power ultimately controls the destiny of any nation. If political leaders delude themselves that their political power is always backed by people's power, they are mistaken. Elected representatives cannot assume that they represent the general will of the people, especially when the electoral system is skewed. It is worthwhile to quote Edmund Burke:


Parliament is not a Congress of Ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain as an agent and advocate against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol but he is a member of parliament.³

Political rulers have to be constantly in touch with the people to be aware of their expectations and aspirations. In many democracies the representatives, upon being elected, have a tendency to become indifferent and isolate themselves in an ivory tower, thereby ignoring the lessons of history. No doubt power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Power combined with corruption contributes to the failure of democracy. This is more so in democracies with developing economies such as India. In recent years, while India prides itself on having achieved a high rate of economic growth, it cannot be denied that corruption has increased, thereby contributing to enormous economic inequality and marked violence in poverty stricken areas. The fight against corruption has not succeeded mainly because the penal system has not been enforced. This does not augur well for Indian democracy.

Corruption and violence corrode the political and economic balance. These can be checked by having adequate and effective laws properly enforced. Fear of prompt detection and quick stringent penal action, without fear or favour, alone can check violence and corruption. There is therefore an urgent need for reforms in the civil service, police administration, the judicial system, and electoral laws. Those in political power need to remember that their political strength will wither away if they do not observe high standards in public life and provide good governance backed by the rule of law. Since political corruption is the starting point for all the evils of good governance, the need for a comprehensive law to regulate political parties, so as to make the political leaders more accountable and transparent, is all too obvious. If the political class does not reform itself promptly, people's power will periodically reassert itself to make it see reason and behave

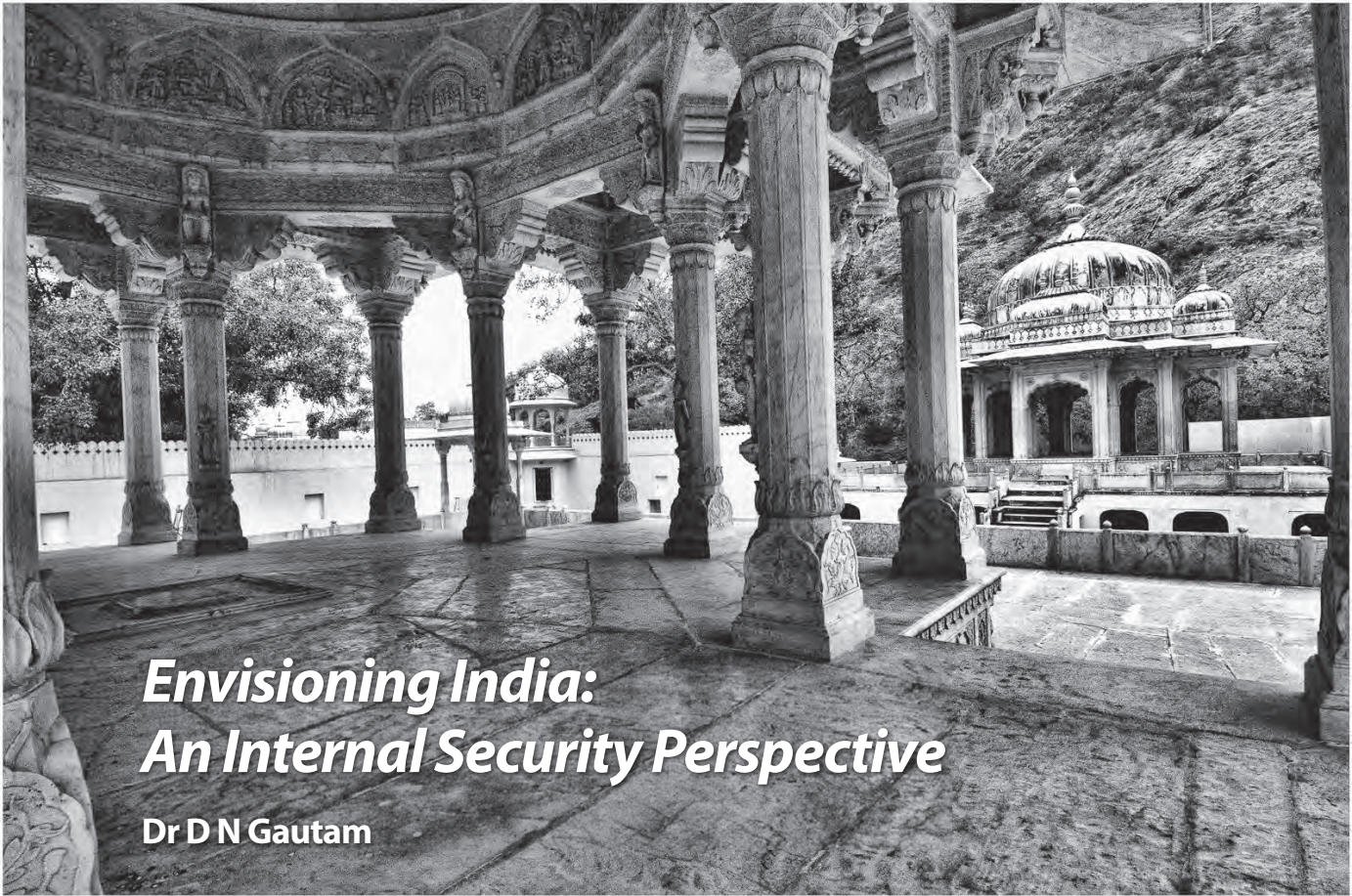
better. The political class cannot and dare not ignore this important lesson of history.

In most places democracy is not effective because people lose sight of its very principles and that democracy requires active participation. Who will keep a watch on the institutions and the politicians but the very people? People think that law enforcement agencies and the judiciary will safeguard society, but this is another illusion. Everyone has to participate and protect democracy, and its ideals must be implemented in every other institution and corporation, whether public, semi-public, educational, private, or religious. The big hue and cry about corrupt politicians and officers running the government machinery will disappear when everyone acts like a guardian of the state, and not merely by thinking democratic rights mean casting one's vote in the ballot box. This is real people's power, for it throws all the responsibility on the citizen's shoulders. Democracy and people's power then become meaningful in such an atmosphere.

Above all, the ideal of society is not limited to a set of material laws and regulations; its purpose is to provide the necessary facilities and peaceful environment to help its citizens achieve the goal of human life: perfection. Only the imperfect need laws, not the perfect, and this perfection can come through practical spirituality as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda. 

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Envisioning India: An Internal Security Perspective

Dr D N Gautam

CAN WE THINK OF AN INDIA through a time-telescope of succeeding centuries with millennium convergence? We have a reasonable assessment of the India that was. We are also reasonably sure of the present reassuring outlook in many critical areas. Many a times, with an uncertain or even fearful perspective, we do entertain a mystic confidence about its future in somewhat indefinable ways. We may even say that the India of our dreams is not one but many—as many people so many dreams. Crisscrossing, converging at peaks, diverging in details and contours, but all share the view of a strong, united, prosperous India; a real economic, knowledge, and military power befitting

its destiny in the comity of nations; a stabilizing democratic republic in a region beset with difficulties and challenges. But dreams are only dreams, they may often go wrong; they could even turn into nightmares.

Whatever be the contours and shades of the India envisioned, the struggles, challenges, and dangers appear to be quite definable and clear. This article is designed to disturb the sleep of the dreamers with the purpose of infusing a level of consciousness that would prevent sweet dreams from turning sour. We must sweat for dreams to remain sweet and then to materialize.

India's Boundary Values and Its Vision

What exactly are our dreams made of? What is it that makes India, India? What does India stand for, its shared values and credibility, its market and tradability, or a golden combination of these? Does India stand for something that

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survives the vicissitudes of times or the fleeting images—like that of the proverbial *sone ki chidia*, a golden bird, or the jewel in the crown of the Empire—something that is eternal, ancient, and at the same time modern and ever fresh. Or is it something that alters, mutates, changes its meaning, and is finally buried in history? India and Indian-ness may be many things to many, but its contradistinctions underline what India is and what it is not in relation to other nations.

We have access to Lord Macaulay's vision of India in the following statement:

I have travelled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.¹

We have been changing the first part of the above text in a most fulfilling tribute to Macaulay. On the other side, we have Arthur Schopenhauer describing the Upanishads as the greatest privilege a reader may have: 'In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Oupnekhat [Upanishads]. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death!'² The first position largely defines the boundary value for the present. But it must be remembered that India has defied even the best doomsday predictions. Far above the present scenario of the re-scripted social values lies Swami Vivekananda's vision of India. More than

a hundred years ago, in 1891, when nothing of India's past glories were visible and the future looked bleak, this was Swamiji's experience:

Out over the ocean, waves of agony rose in the Swami's mind at the thought that nothing but ruins remained of that Great India. He sat on the shore and yearned ardently to fathom the contents of the future. Then rising as from a dream, he betook himself to the monastery founded by Shri Shankaracharya, known as the Sarada Math. Where he was received by the Mahant (head monk), and assigned a room. There, in the silence of his cell, on the ruins of that city of the Yadavas, he saw a great light—the resplendent future India.³

In order to bring this vision to fruition Swamiji worked and infused his power into the veins of the prostrate nation. She would now step out of her various dreams into reality.

The Changing Text

The tail is wagging the lion! Corruption has become rampant in all walks of public life: human trafficking, theft, trade in human organs, rape, murder, drugs, child abuse, domestic violence, poverty, debt burden, and social indifference—the list is too long to enumerate. The government machinery that is supposed to redress this state of affairs is paralysed by the enemy within in the form of greedy officers. Then there are those who have burrowed into this inefficient machinery and, mostly in collusion with it, are involved in black deeds, black money, parking unaccounted money in tax havens, and advocating and financing terror outfits. The criminal justice system is collapsing as much because of overload, as with the rule of law playing truant. The poor could spend their lifetime in jail or running around court offices waiting for justice. But persons with economic and political connections may often be shielded against law. Many a time the politics

of the day determines how matters proceed.

The recent vigilance and direction given by the higher judiciary is seen to prevail over the confusion in order to set the law in motion and make it operative. Simultaneously, the growing awareness of the people in responding to the rot through legal processes for accountability is becoming a force. The media, though at times playing devil's advocate, has also been strident in its denunciations of illegal activities. The youth and the middle class, being affected most, have suddenly taken an avid and active role in moral posturing. It must be said to India's credit that the recent protests elsewhere in Asian countries that took on violent turns have found no echo in India, as the people have come out peacefully and the government has not done any sabre-rattling to stifle countrywide protests.

Is there a way out of all this country's mismanagement and individual integrity? Raising the moral levels of the nation through spiritual awareness seems to be the only way out, which means that the moral responsibility or even constructive responsibility must come alive as an active force.

Nothing happens suddenly, at least not in India, and the present scenario has had a long history of causes. The journey began not long ago, in this nascent Republic of India. A small group of modernists scorned morality as an old-fashioned way to prosperity. Soon they became smart to start cutting corners and taking shortcuts, never minding the means and values like those belonging to the ancient family system. Sections that considered honesty a disposable anachronism started emerging as heroes, marginalizing those who believed in purity of means. With the buffer of moral values staging a huge retreat, the field was left wide open for crime and sleaze. The small group drew another bigger group for a free-for-all. The first get-rich-quick

folks found themselves having to share the spoils with the newcomers. It reminds one of Sri Rama-krishna's parable of a kite flying about with a fish in its beak and being pursued by a group of cawing crows. Only in this case the kite never let go of the fish but shared the spoils with the others—security in numbers.

A new language of euphemism to diffuse and disperse accountability started emerging as new founded partnerships in the governance pushed common people out of the national agenda. Raising Sensex, a whopping growth rate, and an increase in the GNP and the GDP were good enough for a happy and prosperous nation content with a daily average earning of 32 rupees in an urban area as the roof of the poverty line. The recent uproar has for the time being drawn a curtain on the poverty line issue, and the government is moving cautiously. But forebodings are dark, even if silver linings are sought to be fabricated. In the language of India's emerging new economics, ordinary people were introduced to a new karmic law of systemic failure, which pounces on them from time to time.

A whole new language for the alternative order kept developing over the years. Strong laws to deal with organized crime syndicates and money laundering were simply not enacted on the flimsy grounds of being draconian and on the plea of international commitments that was selectively opted or avoided. All such compromises resulted in sabotaging the rule of law, which in turn resulted in individuals or groups becoming law unto themselves. A strong India cannot be thought of with a leadership of weak resolves; the law must rise above such fly-by-night leaders. A few years after independence a whole brood of weak leaders, with an accommodating and elastic conscience made their presence felt. They were not able to rise from their party and its political survival to the reality of the country. Such political leaders

consorted with organized crime, black money, corrupt police and judges—security in numbers.

Over the years the relationship between the state and its citizens has been coming under greater strain on numerous counts, as the state's pervasiveness and citizens' over-dependence on it has been redefining the relationship on a running basis. By stifling the growth of the private sector and enterprise, successive weak governments ruled over a vast inefficient agricultural, industrial, and economic infrastructure. Tightening the issue of licences to their *bêtes noires* and being munificent to their blue-eyed boys, they almost destroyed the inherent business skills and thrift of Indians, which were once the envy of nations. The ordinary Indian also found his trade and skills becoming redundant, and the whole nation slowly came to depend on government doles. With the breaking of the states' stranglehold on markets and industrial sectors the economy surged. The old players, secure and fond of government protection, found themselves swamped with numerous efficient and reliable people. It showed the obvious truth, that government ventures in every field were not only badly managed, inefficient, and corrupt, but the losses were being made up with taxpayer's money. Technology, international markets, and banking broke the walls further. Paradoxically, both government and citizens relished the newfound empowerment through technology, and they are now competing for space on that account. It is now a different type of security in numbers.

Population and Regional Problems

The subcontinent has always been densely populated, but after independence the unbridled growth rate of population has put a severe stress on natural resources. Combined with a vigorous economic growth, the twenty-first century has given rise to an altogether new dimension of

environmental degradation. The earth cannot be stretched; the water cycle is under severe strain; the air in the cities is suffocating under the weight of poisons and pollution released by people, cars, and industries. Humankind has been meddling directly in modifying nature causing irreparable damage to the food chain, apart from directly destroying a large number of species. India had always been a land of plenty, particularly in matters of seasons and biodiversity. Some day we may wake up only to learn that the last tiger is no more. The resulting natural asymmetries in both the physical and the mental well-being are causing unheard-of strife for humans.

The growing population also has put stress on the nation's infrastructure. All this means more causes for disturbance of peace. Systems, institutions, policies, and plans cannot handle the overload. Already electricity and water scarcity are the norm in every city and town. Earlier fighting and killings occurred for water for irrigation; now it has embraced drinking water in its ambit. People are losing hope and virtue as well as patience and the capacity for suffering. This has sometimes given rise to armed and organized resistance that is draining the national coffers. Terrorists and secessionists are another very real threat to national security.

Unemployment and competition to achieve the few juicy jobs have resulted in riding roughshod in the examination system. There are instances of favouritism in the evaluation of answer-scripts to make some examinees pass, or nepotism to make someone top, or even simple revenge to make someone fail by whimsically putting marks without proper evaluation or no evaluation at all on a large-scale. This situation, coupled with corruption in public appointments and many other varieties of transactions, makes the lives of common people very difficult, exacting, and frustrating. The various schemes to

raise the poor and deprived are being funnelled through an infrastructure riddled with holes that channel huge amounts of money to a very different niche. With reasonable accountability, enforceability, and justice at the individual or micro level the masses can hope for a better future. These masses do not want undue protection just transparency in the system, for given the chance they can compete with the best in the country.

With two populous global economic giants like China and India and small impoverished and satellite countries around them difficulties are bound to increase. This arrangement has attracted other countries not just for economic purposes but to vie for a power struggle, as the theatre of power in recent years is shifting from Europe to Asia. This has given rise to some very serious foreign policies among bigger and also smaller nations. The latter are susceptible due to internal disturbances and readily fall prey to bigger powers. With three countries in close proximity possessing nuclear capability the world wants a piece of action in this region. The sale of weapons is another reason why the world is interested in this area to keep it constantly destabilized. A nation that stands so exposed to external factors and benumbed by internal difficulties presents a matrix full of besetting challenges.

A Vision to Unite Dreams

We may never usher in a just order, but there are clearly remediable injustices where our efforts should be ploughed in. Gandhiji and a host of freedom fighters fought to make a better India, including all those who unselfishly sacrificed their lives. The cellular prison of Port Blair on the Andaman Island is a living testimony to this mission. An independent India owes them much more than what we are seeing now.

What is the philosophy of the Indian state? What is its view on moral issues, or morality

itself? What kind of values does the Indian state cherish and practice? Does India retain a spirit or is it just a structure supporting the existence of certain systems to manage its people? Do we have any idea of what India should be known for, or known as, one or two thousand years hence, as we recall an India of yore? Indeed, our object of pride is the treasure trove of Vedic knowledge, bequeathed to us a few thousand years ago rather than the material treasures that we have been robbed of by invaders and foreign rulers. The best monuments are those that still stand as sentinels, as they watch the progress of the nation. Ever since independence there has not been a single structure constructed by our elected governments that would stand a few hundred years. We do not need to construct monuments of course; what we need is to effectuate an ideal vision of India that can be sustained with its eternal values as foundation and value-based structures that ensure value-based living. For these universal values we need to turn to what Schopenhauer spoke of: the Upanishads. A deep understanding of these eternal values, apart from understanding the secret of life and death, will also bring discipline and strict enforcement of fair and impartial laws to stem the anarchy and bring about social peace.

There exists a divine regulator in every person operating through the faculty of discernment and discretion. This is what sets human beings apart from other animals. No manner of policing or enforcement may bring desired levels of national morality and character without the individual's internal purification, and with the people putting society above the petty self. It is for each Indian to decide whether it is a tall order. Without a wholesome internal security philosophy and practice the pale haze that mars the vision of India would continue to raise issues that a proud nation would seek to avoid.

(Continued on page 78)



Mission of Indian Philosophy

Dr R I Ingalalli

I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such expression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others.¹

The philosophy of India percolates throughout the whole civilized world modifying and permeating as it goes (1.383).

IT IS NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND the present situation of philosophy, which has contributed tremendously to Indian culture, in order to project its continuity. Even though the modern world has changed considerably in its external material aspect, due to the advancement

of science and technology, there are persistent attempts to develop the spiritual nature of human beings. In fact, it seems that in the last few centuries material development has moved faster than the pursuit of spiritual happiness and the quest for philosophical truths. To counterbalance this outcome is the mission of Indian philosophy, which carries a message for all times; an ancient message that inspires us by its strikingly modern character and insight.

Meaning of Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophy, as a human enterprise, aims at comprehending the nature of reality in its manifold aspects. Its essential traits are the following: There is a quest for truth in all the systems of Indian philosophy. Each system uses a characteristic method of enquiry. Indian philosophy is essentially spiritual. Its intense spiritual pursuits have been influencing social organizations and

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political structures. The founder-seers of Indian philosophy, apart from erecting intellectual structures of reality, strove to infuse values through a socio-spiritual reformation of the people. These seers had the vision of a fundamental truth for the actual improvement of human lives.

In Indian philosophy there is a blend of logical analysis and rational synthesis; it is self-conscious and critical. In most of the systems the focus is on the self of the human being. Self-knowledge and spiritual realization are the fundamental factors, and there is a careful consideration for the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The primacy of the waking state leads to realistic and pluralistic world views. The Vedantic doctrine coordinates the three states of consciousness in order to postulate the fourth major state of the Atman as integral consciousness. Dr Radhakrishnan observes: 'Philosophy proceeds on the facts of experience. Logical reflection is necessary to ascertain whether the facts observed by one individual are accepted by all, or are only subjective in their character. Theories are accepted if they account for facts satisfactorily. We have already said that the facts of mind or consciousness were studied by the Indian thinkers with as much care and attention as the facts of the outer world are studied by our modern scientists.'² Accordingly, in Indian philosophy there is a systematic study of reality based on observation and reasoning in order to realize the highest truth.

The quest for perfection in the form of knowledge of reality demands one to overcome *avidya*, ignorance. At an individual level it is necessary to get rid of *avidya* and its cognitive moulds, which cause false comprehensions, beliefs, and leads one astray. Philosophy, as a logical enquiry, persuades us to avoid the subjective or psychological utility of rational categories, which are merely personal and relative in the practical world. One of the logical functions of philosophy is to

identify the limitations of the forms of human understanding.

The Sanskrit term 'darshana' captures the sense of 'philosophy'. Etymologically, the root *drik* means 'to see'; in its broader sense 'seeing' is inclusive of perceptual and conceptual knowledge and intuitional experience; therefore, it covers logical enquiry and enquiry of the soul as well. 'Darshana', however, denotes a philosophical system that follows a critical exposition and formulation of doctrines. Consequently, darshana is a system of thought based on a certain type of intuitive experience that is grounded in rational arguments. The *Nyaya Kosha* defines darshana as a systematic treatise containing philosophical knowledge, *tattvajñasadhaanam shastram*. Both orthodox and non-orthodox systems come under the Indian darshanās.

Philosophers with the noble passion for truth struggled to understand the nature of the world and the ultimate reality. They have contributed to the development of Indian philosophical culture through the ages. The continuity of Indian thought is due to the respect for tradition and creativity—and if we consider Swami Vivekananda's words quoted at the beginning, 'the philosophy of India percolates throughout the whole civilized world', then those great souls who produced this great philosophy are to be respected by humanity at large.

Value of Indian Philosophy

Truth has many sides and levels, and Indian thought appreciates the different perspectives: '*Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti*; Truth is one, the sages call It differently.'³ The tradition has a tolerant treatment towards all systems. For this reason there is an important value in the study of Indian philosophy. Swamiji says: 'System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals.

And this is the march of humanity. Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth—but it is never from error to truth.’⁴ The study of Indian thought, even in its historical perspective, reveals worthy ideas of the past that can be applied in the present, as they have stood the test of time. Some of the vital truths of Indian thinkers have influenced the history of humankind and, in consequence, are valuable for the advancement of human knowledge at any time.

The founders of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy are Gautama of Nyaya, Kanada of Vaisheshika, Kapila of Sankhya, Patanjali of Yoga, Jaimini of Purva-mimamsa, and Badarayana of Vedanta or Uttara-mimamsa. The conceptual frameworks of these systems are enriched with creativity and a unified vision that have taken the human race towards a higher path. The systems have generated philosophical illuminating ideas throughout the ages. Even the forms of literary styles in classical Sanskrit are capable of providing delight in the knowledge of truth, *tattvajnanarasa*, to the readers. This philosophical literature will remain a landmark of human thought and genius.

A close study of Indian philosophy is beneficial for adopting a more balanced outlook from a dogmatic understanding of life and the world. If the intellect is free from dogmas and fallacies, it is possible to cultivate creative thinking. For a clearer understanding of Indian philosophy it is necessary to consider certain charges against it and the replies to them. Pessimism, dogmatism, and un-progressiveness are some of the charges. Most of the critics of Indian thought and culture think that pessimism dominates Indian philosophy, and this is due to the *maya-vada* and *shunya-vada* doctrines as well as other-worldly outlooks. However, it is not so, for pessimism is generally defined as a kind of dissatisfaction with

the existing state of affairs, while the postulation of Indian philosophy of reality as *sat* indicates a perfection that contains optimism, truth, and goodness. Moreover, Indian philosophy maintains that there is a way to realize this perfection; hence, there is greater optimism.

Another charge against Indian philosophy is dogmatism. This charge is not tenable because philosophy in general cannot accept any dogma. The systems of Indian philosophy discuss, among several issues, logic, knowledge—their origin and validity as prerequisites for the study of other metaphysical problems—ethics, psychology, and religion. Even the acceptance of the Vedas as the ultimate authority is not dogmatic, as Vedic statements are trustworthy assertions, *apta vachanas*, postulated by rishis, seers, who had better means than ordinary humans to access those issues. Also, the role of reason and experience is consistent with Vedic authority.

Those who believe Indian philosophy is unprogressive think that it is stationary and repeats old ideas. However, Indian philosophy reflects a fundamental identity in its investigation, which is a common trend in all the schools of philosophy. Hence, there is a progress in thinking. The history of Indian philosophy is a function of progressive thinking in the systems. The six systems exhibit rapid progress both in thought and diction. Modern scholars like Dr Radhakrishnan think that the charge of un-progressiveness of a system holds valid only after the great commentators of the scriptures appear on the scene. But philosophical developments in Indian thought continued up to the eighteenth century, as some treatises in Navya Nyaya and Vedanta that were composed during that period. In the Indian tradition the thinkers have to combine respect for the genuine old ideas with the quest for what is true and good in order to revivify and maintain the systems.

Renaissance of Indian Philosophy

A brief review of the last one hundred years, from 1910 to 2010, of Indian philosophy may give certain insights for its plausible projection in the new millennium. Ever since the English administration framed its mission of modern education, the renaissance of Indian philosophy commenced. The universities opened their doors to everyone and hence many who were, due to their social status, debarred for centuries from studying the philosophical systems now contributed, along with orthodox pundits, to their growing popularity. The necessity and advantage of knowing the English language opened the path to the study of Western philosophy and to undertake research and translation of many classical Sanskrit texts that were published for the global community. Perhaps the modern worldwide contribution to Indian philosophy started with Prof. Max Müller's work of love and reverence: *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*. This was later followed by a series of remarkable works: Dr S Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy*, Prof. M Hiriyanna's *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Dr Dasgupta's *A History of Indian Philosophy*, among others. Swami Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* containing the original commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* is a landmark in the field of modern Indian philosophy. Many Indian and Western scholars have contributed to Indian philosophy in English, Hindi, German, French, and other languages. Translations of classical texts with notes appeared in many languages.

Even during the Mughal rule in India the ancient system of schooling at a teacher's house, *gurukula*, had long since collapsed. In places where it still existed the many Sanskrit pundits confined to their traditional learning and teaching darshana, smritis, logic, ethics, and so on were disadvantaged due to their ignorance of modern thought in which many new philosophical ideas

had appeared. And among the advantaged, academic research was mainly comparative and parasitic on original texts. But this situation changed dramatically. There was a surge of interest in Indian philosophy following Swami Vivekananda's mission to the West. Besides, his presentation of the now classical paper on Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions on 19 September 1893 awakened new hopes for an enlightened civilization. Inspired by the works of the swami, original works on philosophy were published by many persons including Aurobindo.

Swamiji, well versed in Western thought, masterly used the English language to preach Vedanta philosophy, bringing in its relation to scientific discoveries. Secondly, Swamiji has emphasized the concept of power in the Upanishads. He identified the Upanishads as a source of integral strength. Accordingly, he advocated the value of strength through Vedantic teachings and in his able hands Vedanta came alive. Lastly, Swamiji had inherited from his spiritual guru Sri Ramakrishna all the levels of spiritual experiences and therefore he was conversant with the whole gamut of philosophical knowledge without their attendant disputations.

For the purpose of reconstructing Vedanta philosophy it is necessary to incorporate the logical scheme of Nyaya, as its methodology is followed in other systems of Indian philosophy as well. The importance of Nyaya Darshana as *anvikshiki vidya*, knowledge of investigation,⁵ has been acknowledged in the classical systems as given below:

*Pradipah sarva-vidyanamupayah
sarva-karmanam;
Ashrayah sarva-dharmanam
shashvadanvikshikimata.*

Anvikshiki [Nyaya Shastra] has been esteemed as the lamp of all sciences, the resource of all actions, and the shelter of all virtues.⁶


However, there has been a decline of philosophical activity in the recent past. Modern thinkers like Dr Radhakrishnan believe that India is no longer playing her historical role of being in the vanguard of higher knowledge in Asia. The river of knowledge that flowed vigorously is likely to end as a mass of stagnant water. Moreover, Indian philosophy is facing a problem of identity. The situation is partly due to the old methods of teaching philosophy still being pursued in universities without bringing in newer methods, changes in social values, the convergence of other religions, and the influence of scientific materialism on Indian soil. Yet, I believe, the future of Indian philosophy is bright. The reason is that many scientists and writers either directly or obliquely refer to the philosophies of the East. Besides Indian psychology and ethics are also being avidly studied.

Since the tendency to philosophize is natural to humans, it is necessary to encourage the study of philosophy. Even a critique of philosophy ought to have a rational world view. The mission of Indian philosophy is primarily concerned with the removal of human *avidya* in order to acquire *vidya*, spiritual knowledge. An adequate analysis of human ignorance in terms of its scope and limits is the beginning of wisdom, *viveka drishti*. Philosophy is the means to discover such knowledge, which removes, or at least reduces, ignorance. On the other hand, the aim of pursuing knowledge in several sciences is to remove as far as possible physical and non-physical evils, *tapa-trayas*, to thus achieve a qualitative and quantitative increase of happiness in the world. However, the knowledge gained by scientific methods may be used in diverse ways, and their consequences are not always good, as experience shows. The scientific investigation of reality has its own limitations.

The removal of moral evil is possible through

philosophical enquiry into human morality. The unity of purpose is related to the final goal of life. The moral and material welfare of people are practically divergent, and ignorance is the root cause of all moral evil in society. If there is conviction in the unity of reality, conduct is rightly adjusted. Though theoretical knowledge is necessary, it is not sufficient. It is necessary to follow the principles offered by Indian philosophy as a doctrine of life; then narrow attachments or selfish impulses can be uprooted.

Simultaneously, moral training is to be supplemented by suitable training of the mind, which consists of meditation upon the ultimate truth along with reasoned conviction of it. As we have said, the aim of Indian philosophy on the theoretical side is the removal of ignorance to achieve spiritual knowledge, and on the practical side, it presents the disciplines to gain spiritual perspective. A person trained in the above mentioned disciplines attains freedom from the negative effects of selfish impulses and an affectionate attitude in interpersonal relations.

Philosophy is intimately related to life and Indian philosophy has been playing a worldwide role of ordering life at several levels. It is our belief that it will continue guiding human actions for meaningful existence in the world. 

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Conservation of Birds in Indian Culture

Dr Suruchi Pande

Have the power to give: give, and there it ends. Learn that the whole of life is giving, that nature will force you to give. So, give willingly. ... You come into life to accumulate. With clenched hands, you want to take. But nature puts a hand on your throat and makes your hands open. Whether you will it or not, you have to give. The moment you say, 'I will not', the blow comes; you are hurt. ... The forest is gone, but we get heat in return. The sun is taking up water from the ocean, to return it in showers. ... A river is continually emptying itself into the ocean and is continually filling up again.¹

A GROWING POPULATION, industrialization, urbanization, hunting, trapping, and the use of pesticides have bad effects on avian life. Humans are speeding up the rate of extinction of various species of birds and animals. It is therefore important to encourage a campaign to save our environment and promote a sustainable conservation. Ethno-ornithology helps us do that. This subject is a sociocultural study of birds. Scientific information needs to

be in harmony with meaningful traditions, indigenous knowledge, and ancient wisdom. India has a rich cultural heritage of thousands of years. References to birds abound in Sanskrit literature.² However, both Sanskrit language and nature conservation have been neglected for several centuries in India.

Birds and animals were used as motifs or symbols to preach dharma. Birds were also personified in stories that gave rise to mythology. Many of today's belief systems are rooted in mythology. Mythological stories are a medium to educate the masses in the essence of dharma and the importance of morality in a simple, unsophisticated, and direct manner. More than ever it is now very important for us to think about the environment and the restoration of the imbalance caused by our interference, exploitation, and negligence. Every culture plays an important role in this mission. We need to preserve Indian culture and the nature that helped shape it.

The first step is to adopt a respectful and humble attitude towards nature and a lifestyle that conserves nature. In this regard His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a role model. He is a peacemaker and has inspired both political and religious leaders. While speaking about an ethical approach to environmental protection, he

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becomes emotional and says: 'We need knowledge to care for ourselves, every part of the Earth and the life upon it, and all of the future generations as well. ... If we have a true appreciation for others and resist acting out of ignorance we will take care of Earth. ... Ancient cultures that have adapted to their natural surroundings can offer special insights on structuring human societies to exist in balance with the environment.'³ The Dalai Lama sadly notes that the advancement of science and technology has greatly affected the ecological balance, which is the very basis of our life on earth.

He has penned his concern in a beautiful poem titled 'The Sheltering Tree of Interdependence':

Under a tree the great Sage Buddha born
Under a tree, he overcame passion
And attained enlightenment
Under two trees did he pass in Nirvana
Verily, the Buddha held the tree
in great esteem. ...

Even in this age of science
Of technology
Trees provide us shelter
The chairs we sit in
The beds we lie on
When the heart is ablaze
With the fire of anger
Fueled by wrangling
Trees bring refreshing, welcome coolness.⁴

Birds and Religion

Birds have made a deep impact on the lives of people. In ancient literature and even in the Upanishads the Atman was often compared to a bird. Our ancestor's keen observation also took in birds and their life cycle. Most humans have always been attracted to the beautiful forms of birds, their magnificent colours, and a variety of calls. Birds like the eagle, the swan, or

the peacock were associated with divine forces or deities. Sage Valmiki saw a pair of sweet-sounding *krauncha*, saras cranes, birds engrossed in their courtship. A hunter shot one of the birds with his arrow, killing the male, and the female lamented piteously. The sage was horrified and deeply moved to see this scene and cursed the hunter. Valmiki found that the curse that had come out from him spontaneously was in the form of a verse. It was a creative composition endowed with an overwhelming feeling of sorrow. He was then inspired to compose the Ramayana. In the words of Leonard Nathan:

The sage is astounded. He has, it seems, just invented poetry. Invented something new out of very old materials: compassion, rage, and grief. ... Vālmiki is the first, the father, of all poets. He is also the first known birdwatcher and it is his birdwatching that has occasioned his invention: from *shoka* (grief) comes *shloka* (poetry). ... But I am still in the forest, held there by Vālmiki's wonder and outrage, and by his joy in making poetry of these human passions.⁵

We come across numerous references to birds in Sanskrit literature right from the Vedas. There are descriptions of birds, their habits, their behaviour, and the role they play in nature conservation, mythology, art, architecture, and so on. There are also superstitions and wrong beliefs regarding certain birds that need to be corrected with affirmative and constructive knowledge. Indian culture offers a unique place to birds with accurate descriptions, traditions, and religious practices, pious acts of austerity, devotion, and respect towards Mother Nature. I shall explain various aspects of birds through some examples from ancient Sanskrit literature.

The oldest references to a bird we find is in the Rig Veda, where *uluka* is the general word for owl and its call or shrill voice was noted.⁶ The *Vajasaneyi Samhita* says: '*Alabhate vanaspatibhya*

ulukan; let the plants get the owls.⁷ Owls were supposed to be offered to the tree god probably because owls roost in trees.

There are mythological stories explaining certain beliefs about the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of birds. For example, in the 'Uttarakanda' of Valmiki's Ramayana we find a story about the peafowl telling how it got a thousand eyes on its feathers. Traditionally, eating particular birds was prohibited in some religions. The Dharmashastras also mention punishments for unnecessary killing of birds. Texts like the *Brihatsambhita*, *Kashyapashilpa*, and the *Vishvakarma Vastu Shastra* prohibit the felling of trees where birds nest.⁸ The *Manusmriti* says: 'One should avoid all carnivorous birds, so also those that live in towns and beasts with solid hoofs not permitted (by this law), lapwings also.'⁹

The *Vrataraaja* mentions an observance called *Kokila Vrata*.¹⁰ The female cuckoo is believed to be a form of Parvati, the consort of Shiva. In this observance married women eat food only after hearing a cuckoo call. The text also gives a story behind this tradition. There are some birds like the eagle or the peafowl that are believed to be vehicles of various gods, goddesses, and river deities. Texts like the *Shulba Sutra* describe the geometrical brick arrangements of fire altars, used mainly for *abhichara* yajnas, which looked like birds with wings spread. These yajnas were performed to enlist help from supernatural forces.

Though there are some wrong beliefs about owls, Indian religion and culture has conferred on them a respectable position. In West Bengal the owl is worshipped as a carrier of Goddess Lakshmi because it feeds on mice, rats, and other creatures that destroy crops. Thus, the bird protects the wealth that is in the form of crops. Pictures and artefacts of Goddess Lakshmi accompanied with an owl are common in West

Bengal. The owl is also believed to be a carrier of Goddess Chamunda and is so depicted in sculptures. Chamunda is the form of Kali who symbolizes the power of time in its all-destroying aspect. She is described as a fierce goddess and is black in complexion. Hence, it is interesting to note that the owl is related to death, which approaches us without giving any intimation, just like the owl pounces on its prey with its peculiar noiseless flight! This philosophical thought elevates the symbol of the owl to a different status.¹¹

There are various beliefs prevalent about good or bad omens on the sighting of various birds. Influenced by the Puranas, beliefs of certain birds being inauspicious have been detrimental to the conservation of birds.

Birds and Sanskrit Literature

There are grammatical and non-grammatical explanations and derivations to show how a particular word is formed. For example, the Sanskrit lexicon *Nirukta* explains the word *tittira*, the bird francolin, as '*tila-matra-chitra iti va*; or because it has variegated spots the size of a sesame seed'.¹² The names of birds are aptly mentioned in various lexicons between the sixth to the seventeenth centuries CE. For example, the *Kalpadrusha* of Keshava mentions the word *vaktravishtha* as a synonym for owl;¹³ the word means 'one who excretes through mouth'. This is a very peculiar observation and description of the owl, which discards indigestible food in pellet form through the mouth. It is extremely important to understand the words in these lexicons as they provide us with the observations made in ancient times. The Mahabharata, the *Linga Purana*, and the *Manasollasa* speak about the language of bird calls. This knowledge was known as *ruta jnana*. Bird motifs have been widely used in maxims and proverbs. For example, the expression *kaka danta* means a crow's tooth, and it is used to

convey something that is impossible or useless, even in philosophical treatises.

The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: 'As a bird bound to a string, flying in all directions and failing to get an abode anywhere else, repairs to the place of bondage alone.'¹⁴ Sri Ramakrishna gives a similar illustration: 'A man cannot renounce action as long as he desires worldly enjoyment. ... A bird sat absent-mindedly on the mast of a ship anchored in the Ganges. Slowly the ship sailed out into the ocean. When the bird came to its senses, it could find no shore in any direction. ... When it found no sign of land in any direction, it came back and settled down on the mast. It did not leave the mast again.'¹⁵ The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* uses the illustration of birds to teach about the Atman settling in the state of deep sleep: 'As a hawk or a falcon flying in the sky becomes tired, and stretching its wings, is bound for its nest, so does this infinite being run for this state, where, falling asleep, he craves no desire and sees no dream.'¹⁶

In Sanskrit literature, there is an abundance of verses describing the beauty of nature in birds. It is said in the Ramayana: 'With their water shrouded in mist and the cranes inhabiting them, discernible [only] by their cries, the streams are perceptible at this time [only] through their banks with sands wet with forest.'¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the Ramayana describes various flying speeds of birds (4.57.24-7). The *Meghaduta* of Kalidasa mentions *krauncha randhra*—*krauncha* is a crane and *randhra* is an opening or hole.¹⁸ It must have been the name of a pass in the Himalayas through which the migratory birds flew.

Birds in Art

We find birds in many art forms, like paintings on rocks or walls. In sculpture too there are carvings that depict the beauty of birds or birds accompanying the deities. Music and dance have used

the imagery of birds for a long time. The *Sangita Ratnakara* of Sharngadeva describes various musical notes adapted from various bird and animal calls. For example, he says that the note of *rishabha* in Indian classical music has been taken from the *chataka* bird—pied crested cuckoo.¹⁹ In the classical dance tradition of India we find references to some mudras that have been adapted from bird behaviour; for instance, the mudra *shuka tunda* means 'beak of the parakeet'. There are some hatha yoga postures imitating the shape of a particular bird: *garudasana* means a posture that depicts the shape of an eagle.

Ayurveda has its own system of classification of birds. The *Charaka Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita* classify birds into three types: (i) *Prasaha* is a class of birds that catch the prey forcibly and eats it; for example the *grudhra*, vulture. (ii) *Pratuda* is a class of birds that beat the prey with their beaks and then eat it; for example the *kokila*, Indian cuckoo. (iii) *Vishikira* is a class of birds that eat the food by scattering it; for example the *kukkuta*, cock.

From ancient times birds were hunted as a favourite pastime, kept as pets, trained as messengers, consumed as food, engaged in games, and used for medicinal purposes. Thankfully, the practice of using birds' organs has now been stopped by the advent of modern medicines.

Ethno-ornithological Studies

Ornithological studies with reference to the cultural background of India will help in obtaining a true picture of ancient and modern India. The following steps can be taken:

1. Compilation of bird and animal stories related to myths and belief systems available in Sanskrit and regional languages. Sanskrit language has formed the basis of Indian culture and that is why it is important to refer to Sanskrit literature.
2. Identification, documentation, description,

and listing of the names of the birds and animals along with their Sanskrit or regional names will give us a picture of the biodiversity of that period.

3. Identification of animals and birds from their behavioural descriptions, which are used in particular mythological stories, whether they are similar, interrelated, or mere poetic fancies.

4. Study of the links, if any, between various beliefs in Indian culture and those of other traditions.


5. Evaluation of the aspects of conservation in the myths and correlation of the occurrence of animals and birds in Indian mythology with birds and animals now documented in India. This will also enable us to understand the extent of cultural exchange between different parts of the country.

6. Study of the modalities—such as fear, reverence, and rewards—used in the myths for promoting nature conservation.

7. Introduction of beautiful bird images to increase awareness regarding nature and wildlife.

8. Inculcation of human values that increase love of nature. This is effective in changing attitudes and eradicating superstition regarding birds and their environment in order to protect them.

Conclusion

Many people all over the world are taking nature conservation seriously by seeing the deleterious effects of humankind's lifestyle. It is now proved that our fragile earth and the environment need to be healthy to confer health to humankind. No aspect of nature conservation is insignificant, as the interaction between nature and human beings is deeper and subtler than what was previously imagined. Besides, nature conservation reveals a society's healthy attitude towards the environment, which comes from a broader view of life. Indian culture strove to inculcate this attitude through its various aspects and also through its sacred, semi-sacred, and other literature. 

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Retelling the Past for the Future

Dr Prema Nandakumar

TO HAVE LIVED IN CONTACT with five generations of people has given me a rich perspective on life. At the same time, I am bewildered at the rapid technological changes sweeping over and moulding society. The one thing that has fascinated me all these decades is the fantastic storytelling ability of our ancestors. It was a revelation to me when I realized that the wily 'Reynard the Fox', who frightened me when I was four years old, is very much in the Hitopadesa. There are plenty of stories in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the *Kathasaritsagara*, and the *Panchatantra* for the younger generation. But one thing has puzzled me: Did I receive the stories of a Lankan king with ten

heads or a young boy dancing on the hood of a cobra in the same way as my mother did when she was a child or my granddaughter does when listening to her mother?

The Bridge of Tradition

Indian tradition is a treasure house of actual experience crystallized through millennia. However, there are changes in society that affect the way this tradition is transmitted. Watching carefully we can see that these changes have a particular pattern: they move on the axis of dharma. And this makes the dynamics of the past, present, and future accessible, as the movements can be predicted. At a personal level it must be remembered that even in one's own lifetime belief patterns change as one's inner psychological needs grow. As far as I know, my mother belonged to a generation that simply

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accepted the received tradition, and this was true for both men and women. The present generation, however, has vastly different psychological needs and consequently its patterns of belief have changed. Today's children may quickly outgrow many beliefs and want higher ones. But what does not change is the faculty of belief, which is natural to every mind.

It seems that among the older generations there was better acceptance of themselves, of their spouses, of situations, and of the inevitable suffering. In the past Indians had mastered the power to suffer more than the power to do. In modern India the pendulum is swinging to the other side, to the power to do. Studying the life of Sita, the all-suffering wife of Rama who went through a hundred trials yet remained unscathed, gave the older generation strength and fortitude to accept everything in life. At the same time, Sita embodied the power of doing, and this is what attracts the veneration of the modern generation. Sita thus bridges the gap between the old and the young generation. While speaking of Sita Swami Vivekananda says:

You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past, and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita. Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but never more than one Sita! She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of Sita; and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman, and child throughout the length and breadth of the land of Aryavarta. There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of

the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God she must always remain. And every one of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish for ever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of Sita present. Mark my words: Sita has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman; we are all children of Sita. Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sita, is immediately a failure, as we see every day. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way.¹

One Long Story

Circumstances do differ, but the eternal verities of love, sacrifice, virtue, heroism, and the like never change. It is increasingly being felt that if we wish to find answers to our current problems, a return to the past can guide us toward the right solutions. The modern generation may ask: 'But how to interpret the past with all its miracles and magical beings?' True, it is not always easy to brush them aside as 'symbolic', because the younger generation wants to have everything posited in a reasoned manner. Symbols are graphic representations of certain ideas and ideals that are conveyed through it. If we can understand what they embody, then it will not create any confusion. Creating symbols is a trait of the human mind. In fact, the younger generation has replaced the old symbology with modern symbols and old mythology with modern myths. Regarding mythology we have replaced the old gods and goddesses with cartoons, and we think the latter as perfectly normal. Swamiji, in his unique style, clarifies:

Human language is the attempt to express the truth that is within. I am fully persuaded that a baby whose language consists of unintelligible sounds is attempting to express the highest philosophy, only the baby has not the organs to express it nor the means. The difference between the language of the highest philosophers and the utterances of babies is one of degree and not of kind. What you call the most correct, systematic, mathematical language of the present time, and the hazy, mystical, mythological languages of the ancients, differ only in degree. All of them have a grand idea behind, which is, as it were, struggling to express itself; and often behind these ancient mythologies are nuggets of truth; and often, I am sorry to say, behind the fine, polished phrases of the moderns is arrant trash. So, we need not throw a thing overboard because it is clothed in mythology, because it does not fit in with the notions of Mr. So-and-so or Mrs. So-and-so of modern times. If people should laugh at religion because most religions declare that men must believe in mythologies taught by such and such a prophet, they ought to laugh more at these moderns. In modern times, if a man quotes a Moses or a Buddha or a Christ, he is laughed at; but let him give the name of a Huxley, a Tyndall, or a Darwin, and it is swallowed without salt. 'Huxley has said it', that is enough for many. We are free from superstitions indeed! That was a religious superstition, and this a scientific superstition; only, in and through that superstition came life-giving ideas of spirituality; in and through this modern superstition come lust and greed. That superstition was worship of God, and this superstition is worship of filthy lucre, of fame or power. That is the difference (2.73-4).

Down the ages the genius of the Indian mind is that it rises to the challenges presented by each new generation. It goes to the core of the original tale and retells it to suit the new age without violating its essence. We, modern writers for adults and children, would do well to use this approach

more often. We must learn from the ancients who understood that each person deep down is unchanging. Surface changes are more due to internal factors being displayed than the influence of the external world. Deep down not just the people of a nation or a race are similar, but humanity is also one. The same joys and struggles are present in everyone everywhere. When the ancients wanted to depict a character in a religious story, they went through every level, from the deepest to the topmost, to give a correct picture of the character that will be relevant to every generation. The majority of modern writers do not have this capacity or the depth of those early writers, who wrote one long story that unfolds gradually and later generations found their needs fulfilled through it. The present generation needs to look just a little below the surface, with which they are engrossed, and then they will find the relevant knowledge that will integrate them.

The story of Savitri and Satyavan that occurs in the Mahabharata, for instance, has been retold by Sri Aurobindo as an epic poem. Their story has inspired millions of people through thousands of years. Their story is meant not only for spiritual aspirants but for everybody, the old and the young; it is relevant to contemporary life as well, for their story is our story. Savitri, the princess of Madra, had chosen the exiled prince Satyavan as her husband. In spite of the sage Narada's pointing out that the young man had only one year to live, she marries Satyavan with the blessings of her parents. She is an ideal daughter-in-law and wife in the forest hermitage where they all live. As the year draws to a close, Savitri performs a *tri-ratra vrata*, vow of three-nights of fasting and prayer. When Yama takes away Satyavan's life, she follows him impelled by the strength of the vow, speaks to Yama, and gets back the life of her husband as well as several boons. Satyavan's father Dyumathsena is restored to his kingdom

and all is well. Sri Aurobindo, in his retelling the story of Savitri, has brought out its mystical significance of the human journey from the human to the Divine. It is not the mere conquest of death; it is about how the universe was created and for what purpose. He has described it all in beautiful and clear words, so that spiritual adventurers who wish to solve the mysteries of the world may understand it more easily:

O Death, not for my heart's sweet poignancy
Nor for my happy body's bliss alone
I have claimed from thee the living Satyavan,
But for his work and mine, our sacred charge.
Our lives are God's messengers
beneath the stars;
To dwell under death's shadow they have come
Tempting God's light to earth
for the ignorant race,
His love to fill the hollow in men's hearts,
His bliss to heal the unhappiness of the world.
For I, the woman, am the force of God,
He the Eternal's delegate soul in man.
My will is greater than thy law, O Death;
My love is stronger than the bonds of Fate:
Our love is the heavenly seal of the Supreme.
I guard that seal against thy rending hands.
Love must not cease to live upon the earth;
For Love is the bright link
twixt earth and heaven,
Love is the far Transcendents' angel here;
Love is man's lien on the Absolute.²

Among other excellent storytellers for the new generation is J P Vaswani. He is able to choose and present those nuggets in our tradition that narrate an exciting tale carrying a moral. When King Ajatashatru's elephant Nalagiri was let loose on Buddha, everyone was terrified. Some of the disciples who were walking with him fled. Others stood petrified. Vaswani writes as if he is speaking to a group of children, making appropriate gestures to recreate the day gone by:

Call it a miracle, if you will! It was not a miracle; it was the magic of the Master's presence, of one who would harm no one in thought, word or deed! The elephant bowed down to the Master, then quietly got up! The Master stroked his forehead and spoke a gentle word or two of love. Nalagiri had become a new elephant, tame and docile. Overwhelmed with joy and relief they cried out: 'Wild elephants are tamed with blows, but the great elephant among men has tamed Nalagiri with a blessing and a smile!'³


In any retelling of the past for the future we would do well to see this approach used.

The Thread of Continuity

Illustrated story books have been of great help in retelling old stories. Going a step further, we have transformative presentations too as seen in Siddharthan's *Global Krishna*. The childhood, boyhood, and youth of Sri Krishna have always been our favourite. There are so many adventures! Siddharthan has taken the major legends concerning Sri Krishna and Balarama and has sent them around the world. Evil always is destroyed. Incidentally, bits and pieces of lessons in geography, biology, and ethics are inserted in appropriate places. It is a typical grandpa telling stories to the little ones around him, anxious to pass on a great heritage to the future generations.

We also have television serials and dramas that show mythological stories as well as all the other great inspirational stories in a creative new way; they act as a bridge between the past and the future. For instance, the saga of the great King Harishchandra, the embodiment of charity and truth, still moves us deeply as it did our ancestors for thousands of years. This only goes to prove that the link with the past is never lost. Besides, we still name our children with the old names found in the epics and the Puranas.

When I was a child and went to a rich

neighbour's house to see the radio they had bought—this was in the 1940s—I found a huge contraption. It was a heavy HMV radio, and I heard music coming from it. I ran back in consternation to ask my mother how a person could sit inside that small 'shelf' and sing! Such was my childhood, and I have not lived down that day! Today my grandchildren, not yet in their teens, are creating their own robots. They ask for a 'password' and the latest version of Photo-shop and what not. Today's children certainly exhibit a new consciousness. So, how am I going to speak to them of Sri Krishna and Balarama performing all those superhuman feats described in the ancient books? Swamiji says: 'We must not forget that there will come men after us who will laugh at our ideas of religion and God in the same way that we laugh at those of the ancients. Yet, through all these various conceptions runs the golden thread of unity.'⁴ We have God's plenty in our past. It is in our hands to take a minuscule portion of it by discovering the golden thread of narration that binds present and future generations to the past. 


It was also from his mother that he [Swami Vivekananda] first heard the tales of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. At the Datta home these epics were read every day at noon. One elderly lady—sometimes Bhuvaneshwari herself—would read aloud, and the ladies of the family, who for the time being had finished their duties, would sit round her. In this small congregation, turbulent Naren would be found sitting quietly throughout the reading and listening with rapt attention: There can be no doubt that the stories from the epics exerted a great influence on his mind.

—*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.14

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(Continued from page 63)

With social walls constantly being broken down, the energy of the people is gathering momentum in rushing out and contributing to its development. Yet, each person has his or her dream of India to materialize, but that can never be in the long run, for these dreams are like a utopia of one's personal desires. The soul of India rises above personal dreams, and when Indians can put aside their juvenile dreams and see the reality based on the mystic vision of its seers, then will India rise more glorious than ever before. That India has survived innumerable vicissitudes is because she held on to that mystic vision given by the ancients. This vision is the best form of security for the country. 'India,' Swami Vivekananda says, 'shall rise only through a renewal and restoration of that highest spiritual consciousness that has made her, at all times, the cradle of the nations and cradle of the Faith' (1.341). 

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The Ramakrishna Movement and the Bhava Prachar Parishad

Tattwakandar Misra

OVER THE LAST CENTURY a large number of monastic communities have imperceptibly cropped up all over India. Belonging to different denominations and sects, most of them have invariably been implementing, in some form or another, schemes for social uplift. Another area in the religious field is the amazing growth of women's monastic orders administered independently by women. After Buddhism history has not seen such a strong trend of women taking to monasticism. Both these types of monastic communities draw many lay devotees. A good many of these centres were initially started by lay devotees and some of them gradually turned to monasticism.

A large number of such monastic and non-monastic communities centre round the

worship of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, and also round the ideas and ideals of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Such communities are most visible today because of their commitment to the country's social uplift. Swami Vivekananda speaking of Sri Ramakrishna had declared in his Calcutta lecture: 'Here is a manifestation of the most marvellous power that has been for several centuries in India, and it is your duty, as Hindus, to study this power, to find what has been done for the regeneration, for the good of India, and for the good of the whole human race through it.'¹

Formation of a Parishad

The idea to unite many of these monastic and lay communities on a zonal and national basis, in order to harness their power for greater good, was formulated by the Ramakrishna Sangha. Today the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad—or simply the Parishad—is a council or an advisory body that brings together

Tattwakandar Misra has been devotedly running, for many decades, the Vivekananda Ashrama at Cuttack, Odisha, which comes under the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad.

these organizations inspired by Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings, which proclaim the spiritual nature of the human being and its realization as the goal of life.

Of course, most of the organizations under the Parishad were directly or indirectly started by the Ramakrishna Sangha. In many cases sincere initiated devotees formed a small group inspired by the lives and teachings of the Holy Trio. These groups organized study circles that gradually grew and took the shape of registered societies. The study circles are occasionally visited by swamis who conduct spiritual retreats and teach scriptures. A few young unmarried persons from these centres become monks and join the Ramakrishna Sangha, while others become monks but prefer to start their own monastic centres.

Some centres have been established at the instance of the Ramakrishna Sangha's service activities in different locations of India. Gradually, such monastic and non-monastic communities are spreading like branches of a huge tree all over the country. Whatever may be the reason behind the origin of these organizations, the chief cause is that their founders and members were caught in the strong current of Sri Ramakrishna's divine love. The organizations coming under the Parishad are termed 'private ashramas', as they are not legally affiliated to the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Many of these communities conduct regular spiritual and social programmes and are managed by householders or lay devotees, or by monks not belonging to the Ramakrishna Sangha. They act as channels distributing the spiritual waters for the good of the many and for the spiritual happiness of the many.

Long before the formation of the Parishad a number of such private ashramas were taken over by the Ramakrishna Sangha and made branch centres. This process of converting private

ashramas into affiliated centres continues even today. Such transformation becomes possible because the private ashramas usually follow the work-pattern of the Sangha and even adopt some of its aims and objectives in their constitutions, maintaining a close rapport with the monks of the Sangha or the nearby affiliated centres.

Each private ashrama is a registered society with the principal aim of spreading Sri Ramakrishna's universal message. Every such centre has devotees of different natures, talents, backgrounds, and temperaments bound by a common goal. These centres generally start with a few sincere and dedicated members and as they gather momentum their sphere of activities extends and the number of members increases. Close monitoring, either by swamis or by senior members of the ashrama, is undertaken to keep the movement free from individual peculiarities that might dilute the ideal and cause infighting.

The establishment of private ashramas dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. The gradual growth in their numbers and the appearance of some other spurious organizations drew the attention of the Ramakrishna Sangha's authorities, who felt the urgent necessity of patronizing genuine ashramas. Today such genuine private ashramas number in the thousands. And as it is neither possible nor desirable to absorb all such ashramas into the fold of the Ramakrishna Sangha, the concept of a Parishad came up to bring the genuine ashramas under one umbrella. This move gave a stamp of wider recognition to them, and in turn they also had the benefit of constant interaction with the parent body. Thus, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prachar Parishad became an institution of the Ramakrishna Sangha with well-defined guidelines after the Second Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in 1980.

The Ramakrishna Movement

Swami Vivekananda has declared that the Ramakrishna Sangha is the body of Sri Ramakrishna. Initially, the Sangha consisted of monks and initiated devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. But during the Second Convention the then president Swami Vireswarananda drew attention also to another dimension of the movement. According to him, anyone who subscribes to the ideas and ideals of the Sangha, even if they are not initiated by a monk of the Sangha, is a member of the Sangha. This view is wider in scope than the earlier one, for it embraces anyone irrespective of language, race, creed, monastic or non-monastic status, who loves and supports Sri Ramakrishna's universal and liberal ideas.

Thus, the Ramakrishna Sangha may be defined as an organization or a body of individuals harmoniously united to become the instrument or channel of the Ramakrishna movement. It is a young organization, gradually growing in size and strength, and constantly inducting new members. As in every organization persons of different capabilities and talents are necessary; the high idealism and immense practicality of the Sangha is drawing such genuine souls into its fold. But if by the Ramakrishna movement we mean only the Ramakrishna Math and Mission with its branch centres, then we limit the immense power and gigantic magnitude of the Ramakrishna movement—though, of course, the Ramakrishna Sangha forms the core, the nucleus of the Ramakrishna movement. The Sangha was formed by Sri Ramakrishna himself while he was alive. Unfolding the wider meaning of the Sangha's membership, Swami Vireswarananda pointed out this immeasurable aspect of the Ramakrishna movement.

In his paper on 'Hinduism' presented at the Parliament of Religions on 19 September 1893, Swami Vivekananda uses the analogy of

a tsunami to describe Hinduism's resilience: 'Sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith' (1.6). In these lines Swamiji has also referred to the nature of the Ramakrishna movement. In his letter dated 28 May 1894 addressed to Alasinga Perumal, Swamiji clearly says: 'Up, up, the long night is passing, the day is approaching, the wave has risen; nothing will be able to resist its tidal fury. ... The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it rolling over the land resistless, boundless, all-absorbing' (5.35). Swamiji has described here not just Hinduism but the overwhelming power of the Ramakrishna movement.

If the Ramakrishna movement is 'boundless' and 'all-absorbing', then channelizing this 'resistless' flood of spirituality down to the lowest and poorest becomes imperative. This is the great task not just before the Ramakrishna Sangha and the Parishad but before all persons even remotely connected with the idea of religious and social work. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda have made religion dynamic and oriented for this age. Service to humankind is an effective form of worshipping God. This worship will lead towards the spiritualization of humankind. Swami Vivekananda has envisioned Sri Ramakrishna on the topmost crest of the tidal wave of spirituality that would sweep humanity and carry it to a higher level of consciousness.

Spreading Sri Ramakrishna's Bhava

Almost all who have come to the Ramakrishna

movement have done so after reading Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. But selling or distributing books and letting Sri Ramakrishna do the rest is not enough. One has to read, meditate, and assimilate the teachings because *bhava*, the spirit, does not spread only by literature; it spreads through exemplary lives, through those who live the ideal. *Bhava* does not mean ideas expressed in words or by speech; it is a living vibrating force, and its language and influence is very powerful. It is consciousness expressed in the form of truth, beauty, and goodness. Therefore, persons associated with the Bhava Prachar Parishad should first carry within them Sri Ramakrishna's *bhava*. As Swamiji says: 'Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is aroused to self-conscious activity' (3.193). Such awakened souls will awaken other sleeping souls.

The Ramakrishna ideal is so vast that each and every person can proceed towards it in accord with his or her individual mental make-up. Some may proceed faster than others but, as Sri Ramakrishna says, everybody will get prasada at Sri Annapurna's temple; no one will go hungry for long. This path to Sri Ramakrishna is the path of spirituality, and the more people traverse it, the more will humankind become spiritual. This path is beset with many difficulties; it demands much sacrifice, but it will bring out the best qualities from within and finally confer immortality.

Swamiji says that what he has given the world will last for centuries. The Ramakrishna movement is thus a little over a century and its accomplishments are already tremendous. If the work of previous avatars is still very much alive and strong, what to speak of Sri Ramakrishna who, as Swamiji declares, is *avatara-varishta*, the greatest avatara? The power of Sri

Ramakrishna will work even after many centuries. The modern spiritual history of India has begun with Sri Ramakrishna, and posterity will probably remember those who came at the beginning and helped spread his *bhava*.

The active role of the Ramakrishna movement has come at the right time in India. The world is changing so fast that what was considered to be impossible a few decades back has now become technically possible. Progress in science and technology has also brought radical changes in human lives and values. On the other hand, there is no respite from poverty and exploitation of the weak. The conditions of the deprived, for which Swamiji's heart bled, continues to remain sad and in some cases it has worsened. It is here that the role of the Ramakrishna Sangha, and specifically of the Parishad, becomes relevant. Although the number of monastics and non-monastics is very small in comparison to the extent of suffering, organized efforts can effectively be used to meet the challenge. This does not mean that poverty should be used as an incentive to work among the poor, but Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings should reach each and every person, as many are in dire need of it.

However, a well-organized private ashrama may not be able to sustain its enthusiasm and cohesion for a long time, because the householders are not so well-tuned as the monks and nuns are. Therefore, monks and nuns must be able to motivate others who have started with enthusiasm but lag behind due to innumerable factors. These monks and nuns will encourage lay members to develop their sense of responsibility and a feeling of belonging to the Ramakrishna movement. Such a feeling in its turn will make the ashramas more efficient and more in consonance with the guidelines laid down and agreed upon by all member ashramas.

(Continued on page 89)



An Enquiry into the Strength of Law

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THE MOST SERIOUS COMPLAINT against the Indian legal system (ILS) is that though Indian legal prescriptions are very good and based on sound principles, its enforcement is very weak and the enforcement machinery very inefficient. Concerns for law enforcement and delivery of justice may be very different and often significantly vary. Is the strength of law dependent on the external enforceable machineries or is it concerned with the pursuit of justice or with both? This question is not complicated to address in the UK common law system, because the country is small and investigators, prosecutors, judges, and pleaders are not playing musical chairs subjected to quick transfer at all stages, bringing more political interference in administration, uncertainty,

repetition, and procedural gaps in every stage of dispute resolution, be it in criminal or civil or any other pecuniary influence. UK courts are courts of law and the question of delivery of justice is raised in only a very few instances. In contrast, the Indian Constitution has made the courts to be courts of justice, and justice has to be total—economic, social, and political. Therefore there can always be a doubt whether the enforcement of law can meet the ends of justice! That is what makes us research the morphological order of law to look at the structural strength or weakness of the ILS. If the structure of the ILS is such that asking for the end-product of justice is simply an illusion, we can conclude that there is something inherently erring in the system-structure, because the system is essentially a British-hangover! We have to find a completely new set of alternatives. The enquiry involves a theoretical as well as a practical exercise specific to the ILS.

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A Theoretical Enquiry

Some philosophers think that law and justice are the two sides of the same coin. Unfortunately, that may not be so in reality. In a society run through 'rule by law', justice is coterminous with rule-book exercise. Human society is not robotic; hence, justice does not necessarily follow the rule-book. Besides the physical existence *annamaya-kosha*, the human being has also a mind, *manomaya-kosha*, the most sensitive element as the reactive agent. With it developed the field of rationality, logic, and philosophy. Natural law philosophers tried to establish the concept of justice as the logical process in rational discourse. Those issues are not part of our present enquiry, though it is true that many such issues are interconnected with the present enquiry on what provides the strength to law. Here the word 'strength' does not mean a short-term 'muzzle' or a 'gunman' force that we try to find in law. We know that many of the laws in the past backed up by a very strong 'gunman' for enforcement have crumbled soon after. In 'strength' a mere externality in force or enforcement modality is not enough, and this has been repeatedly found in human history. As a matter of fact, even canonical law is now questioned within a very closed circuit of the Roman Catholic society. The reasons for strength—not force—of law that we will try to discover here do not depend on how law, and which law, 'maximizes the benefit for the maximum number of people', but depend on whether observance of governance can lead to the reign of truthful, *sat*, thinking, *chit*, and ecstasy, *ananda*, which is the hallmark of social existence.

Rabindranath Tagore tried to touch the core of justice in one of his illustrious poems. He wrote: 'Justice is done when on imposing the punishment, tears roll down the cheeks of the judge and the accused, both alike!'¹ In every

human being there is a sense of just and of unjust, of right and of wrong. How does this sense lie in every human being? Is it self-generated, a priori, and automatic? The present enquiry is in pursuit of this understanding. It is therefore necessary to have a critical analysis of what evolves in natural law and law of nature.

The law of nature produces a scientific explanation of any 'effect' and finally determines the causal relation with any effect. At any point in the history of humankind many of the causal relations behind the observable human behaviour were unknown, but now with the exposure of DNA analysis many of these can be rightfully established. After all, the history of science is only at best coterminous with human history, and modern science is not older than four or five thousand years. Natural law is what Tagore tried to touch upon in his poem, which concerns with human impulses, emotions, and the values humanity stands for.

One may be sympathetic to the argument that there exists a grand structural relation between all physical and human systems in our universe so as to form a grand cosmological alliance. This alliance is not an alliance of convenience or any predetermined notions of law of nature and the behavioural laws of human being. This grand alliance of coexistence and interdependency between nature and human beings is self-evident, autonomous, and perceptible to rationality. There is no place in the galaxies for any sudden or inexplicable chaos to happen without there being a reason for such a phenomenon. This is equally true both in the case of physical as well as human history of natural biological evolution. The domain of human knowledge is still in its infancy, and hence we are conscious that we know how little we know. This is more so in the knowledge domain about our universe; human history is only a minuscule part.

Therefore, strength of any system or sub-system in nature and human behaviour is not only required to be identified in the architecture of that system or sub-system, but also in its 'composability' or compatibility within the grand ordering of the universe. It is true that knowledge and understanding of such 'composability' or compatibility has to be based on the contemporary standard of knowledge of human beings, both in the physical and the behavioural sciences. The entire arrangement of logic is the induction of construction of a future destiny of the universe and its population, as evidently ordained today based on its historical process. The only abstract on presumption is that in a given situation a particular result would always occur. This is the basic law for causal relation in phenomenology.

Whereas the first enquiry relates to the structural phenomena, commonly understood as the architecture of the specific system, physical in character, the later enquiry in the grand ordering, to a larger extent, is metaphysical. It would also be too simplistic to suggest that physical structural framework is only pure, autonomous, and self-evident, devoid of any deontological application. Nor can it be definitely explained that all metaphysical arguments are completely illusory or pseudo-scientific; such arguments are incapable of being put through a positive construction. Trying to find the strength of any system is, naturally, a complex investigation. Finding strength or the reason of strength in a legal system is both a study on existentiality as well as a functional morality.

Two Meanings of Law

Though there is no inherent and necessary conflict between 'self' and 'soul', yet the debate between the two has always been fascinating in the broader context of body and mind, law and ethics, as also law and morality, the law and

religion, or law for human actions and law of God. Whereas self refers to the physical existence of a being, that is the body—or in other words, the matter that generates the sound-wave—and is seen through external behaviour, soul refers to internalities and is innate in the mind and the psyche—in other words, psychic self—as if self were the hardware and soul the software embedded in that hardware. Law dealing with self refers to law on human behaviour, and law dealing with soul refers to a host of values like ethical and moral appreciation, including the capacity of understanding and appreciating various behavioural 'oughts'. There is a strong relation between these two frames of law for holistic appreciation of law 'of' human action and law 'for' human action. In the first sense law, as the formal science of external human behaviour, is the discourse on Nomology, rules of external action, in which an external legislation is possible, and in the later sense law is an inward journey into human being, which can hardly be totally legislated upon without empirical substances. The unionization of these externalities and internalities of law has been a unique feature of law and justice.²

In Indian philosophy 'dharma' designates the confluence of these two flows of Nomology and ethics, that is law for the self and law for the soul. And this convergence provides greater strength to law. 'Law is the King of Kings, far more powerful and rigid than they: nothing can be mightier than law, by whose aid, as by that of the highest monarch, even the weak may prevail over the strong.'³ Stoic philosophers wrote Holland, 'were in the habit of identifying Nature with Law in the higher sense, and of opposing both of these terms to Law which is such by mere human appointment. "Justice", they say, is by Nature and not by imposition.'⁴

Ritam, according to Indian philosophy, is the highest order of cosmological balance regulating

the highest order of reasons. In the Greco-Roman legal system Cicero wrote: 'Highest law was born in all the ages before any law was written or State was formed.'⁵ The highest reason was 'implanted in Nature that commands those things which ought to be done and prohibits the reverse' (ibid.). The Indian concept of *ritam* is of a higher order than the law of nature, as the former is the law of cosmological consciousness. On the other hand, in the Greco-Roman legal system transcendentalism perceptible to supramental consciousness could not be captured. Therefore, it started from architecting the legal system in the morphological order of *jus naturali* at the base and then structuring the differential legal order of *jus civili*, among Romans, and *jus gentium*, among Romans and non-Romans. However, the 'law merchant' used to regulate jurisdiction over foreign merchants.

The relation between religion and law is very complex. Theological principles and legal philosophy often flow through the same stream, but there are cross-currents too, in which case both these systems either cross-fertilize each other or attempt to demonstrate primacy and preponderance over each other. Medieval European history, for example, proves umpteen instances of clash of interest between the monarch and the Church. Comparatively, the Indian system was more harmonious and consensual. But it was not always conflict-free. Kautilya's challenge to the Nanda dynasty is an example.

If there has to be a detailed exercise for the determination of the morphological structure of law and legal principles, some initial principles of social structure must have been drawn from religion, which in the course of time became time-tested, providing the fundamental principles of law. But there has always been varied approaches in the relational-mix between canonical law and the law of the political and civil society. In recent

times, on several occasions, issues have been raised in all formats of social structure that reopened the debate on the predominance between antinomianism and legalistic rule-based structure in matters long considered as a 'holy cow' in the religious world, unquestioned and unquestionable legalistically. Some such trigger-incidents always remain in contrast, like sexual abuse of minors in various countries by the Catholic clergy;⁶ sexual exploitation and aggrandizement by some Hindu pontiffs upon their disciples, or any extramarital life of them;⁷ property relation and principles of succession in properties belonging to a temple, a church or mosque, or to priesthood on the demise of the chief priest or head of the community; fundamentalism of religious seers and monks; relations among gays or lesbians, or in matters of surrogacy or euthanasia. Several authors from theology and law raised issues like these: Should the canonical law of religious faiths be subjected to legalistic rule-based interpretation and enforcement or must the matter be left to the people heading the realm of faith? Should the succession to the position of highest priest, like the Pope or the pontiff of a Hindu temple, be decided by vote based on 'one person, one vote', or by way of ordinary rule of testamentary, or intestate succession? Volumes have been written on the impact of antinomianism and legalism in canon law,⁸ which is not the object of this essay. The enquiry is only on the determination of the place of religion or theology in providing strength to law.

Take for example the argument that a priest committing sexual exploitation of a child should be expelled from the clerical state, or banned from public ministry for life,⁹ or from the religious system of authority for some time as the 'only' and 'sufficient' punishment. Should there be an ordinary trial in a court of law for sexual abuse regardless of the religious status of the accused? Would it not be a double jeopardy? Supply of

human resources into the hard life of a priest in Christianity has been so limited in our modern world that it is argued that the priest be treated under canon law softly for such an offence¹⁰ and could be allowed to have a married life. But how can the rule of law treat them separately?

Origins of Law

Let us for the time being make a deep dive in the historical guess of an ancient society, as Nozick did,¹¹ to understand and appreciate the plight of human beings on this lonely planet. Imagine how the ancestors of modern human beings were forced to form groups in that hostile nature and environment to strive for existence in the state of nature. How those groups of people used to run from place to place in search of food and live in an area having basic protection against vagaries of nature and hostile animals. These groups were constantly fighting to have control of the community and at the same time fighting externally to dominate over other groups as well as avoiding natural extinction. That was what the 'survival of the fittest' used to mean. This period of prehistoric cruelty perhaps provided the first lessons for rationality to grow. It took hundreds of years for human beings to develop a tribal or clannish social life and also to achieve some order under the dictate of the strongest—muscleman's theory. A rudimentary social structure though, the entire tribe was kept intact with the strongest order of either compliance or annihilation. It was then the beginning of law and order in its most elementary and simple form. Law and strength of law perhaps originated at the same time in those early days of human history. Can we see the footprints of our modern 'gunman' theory?¹²

Thus, in that pre-state society, law and the force to apply law were coterminous. The so-called law was in the form of a 'simple order' orally communicated; though most comprehensive to

cover all aspects of daily life, yet most ruthless and dreaded. As society progressed the law became complex in the layers of legal structure in all legal systems.¹³ The two streams of discourse in the development of a legal system grew, one in the positive sense through the exercise of the political power of the state,¹⁴ and the other through the normative discourse in the exercise of ecclesiastical process.¹⁵ The two sometimes grew fiercely in conflict and sometimes complemented each other. In modern legal philosophy law is a positive science of regulating human behaviour, equal for all concerned in all circumstances.¹⁶ It is a most convenient weapon in the hand of the state to ensure 'rule by law' and 'law and order' in the way the state desires. Law, on the other hand, developed as a normative science through various religious and social institutions and interactions.

Force, in an external sense, is the external force applied by the state to enforce the legal proposition in the form of order. This is what is theorized by Hart in his gunman's theory. On the other hand, strength is internal and based on the rationality and mental conscience that enables the law to be self-evident, autonomous, acceptable to and observable by all as the 'law for the soul', the law of conscience. One may wonder how millions of people, uninformed, ill-informed, or uneducated, more often than not, keep themselves in the right side of the law without doing anything wrong in their daily life and seldom do something adverse to common conscience. On the other hand, people in the so-called high echelons of society and walking in the corridors of political power, indulge in offences involving moral turpitude, cheating the public exchequer of a country leaving millions of people below the poverty line to starve. They hide their actions for ulterior motives of enjoying some earthly pleasures!

Often these two different streams of arguments are captioned under two discourses, namely, 'rule by law' and 'rule by conscience'; the former literally would mean enforcement according to 'his Master's voice' in the form of codified law, and the latter is conscientious application of rule to deliver justice. It may be true to suggest that often any adventure to justice may weaken the external force for enforcement of law by those who only intend to weaken the law for ultimate material gains. Thus, justice often raises questions through the process of rationalization in the application of law and makes political enforcement of law weak.¹⁷ In recent times the Supreme Court of India did not favour the state to arm a section of the people to fight the so called Mao-followers waging firearms against the state machineries, which according to the Supreme Court is a counterinsurgency. History bears testimony that judicial process puts doubts on the unconditional enforcement of law, though it contributes to the progress in human rights discourse. Of course, in the seventeenth century there was a doubt raised on justice, to be equal to 'chancellor's foot' as distinct from application of rule by law.

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. Extract from the poem *Gandharir Avedan*.
2. These two courses of law as the science to deal with human actions have been clearly identified by Immanuel Kant. Holland observed that 'the moral sciences having thus been grouped under the head of Ethic, in which the object of investigation is the conformity of the will to a rule; and the Nomology, in which the object of investigation is the conformity of acts to a rule'—Thomas Erskine Holland, *Elements of Jurisprudence* (New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, 2006), 28. Holland further argues that 'Nomology, the science of external action, must be divided according to the authority by which the rules of which it treats are enforced, into (I) A science of rules enforced by indeterminate authority, (II) A science of rules enforced by determinate authority. What may be vaguely called "moral laws" are of very various origin and obligation. Their common characteristic is that, although no definite authority can be appealed to in case of their infraction, yet those who obey them are regarded with favor, and those who disobey them with disfavor' (ibid.).
3. *Shatapata Brahmana*, 14.4 and 4.2; *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4.14; 'A Treatise on Hindu Law and Usage' Bajkumar Sarvadhikari's Tagore Lectures, 1880, 136. See <http://www.archive.org/stream/atreatiseonhindo3mayn-good_djvu.txt> accessed 11 November 2011.
4. *Elements of Jurisprudence*, 33. He further quotes Chrysippus: 'The common law, which is the right reason, pervading all things, identical with Zeus, the supreme administrator of the Universe'.
5. Jeremy Taylor maintains that: 'The law of nature is the universal law of the world, or the law of mankind, concerning common necessities, to which we are inclined by nature, invited by consent, prompted by reason, but is bound upon us only by the command of God'—*Elements of Jurisprudence*, 34.
6. John J Coughlin wrote: 'Not limited to the United States, public scrutiny of the Catholic priesthood soon surfaced in other countries including, inter alia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Poland. The image was one of the suspect church in crisis whose priests posed a threat to the public good'—John J Coughlin, *Canon Law* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 1.
7. The ongoing trial in the case of Paramahansa Nithyananda in Karnataka on the charges of raping some female disciples is an illustration.
8. Jan Rietmeijer opines that bishops should dispense priests from celibacy and allow them to continue their ministry because 'human beings can not be sacrificed to general rules and systems'—Jan Rietmeijer, 'The Competence of the Bishop in Matters of Dispensation', in *The Future of Canon Law: Concilium* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1969), 101, 114. Coughlin suggested that 'antinomianism views the law as an


obstacle to individual freedom in the personal response to God'—Reverend John J Coughlin, 'Antinomianism and Legalism in Canon Law', *Contemporary Issues in Canon Law*, ed. Patricia M Dugan, Gratianus Series, Wilson & La Fleur (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2011), 4.

9. Coughlin suggests that 'the serious penalties provided for in Section 2 of Canon 2395 reflect the gravity of the delict committed when a cleric sexually abuses a minor. The provision stated that the guilty clerical may be "deposed", or permanently removed from the clerical state, which is the most serious penalty available against a priest in canon law'—'Antinomianism and Legalism in Canon Law', 8.
10. See endnote 8.
11. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).
12. See H L A Hart, *Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 18–25. The author writes that the most important of these situations is one to which the word 'imperative' seems especially appropriate.
13. See Chhatrapati Singh, *Law from Anarchy to Utopia* (Delhi: Oxford, 1985), vi–xiii.
14. J Bryce says that for the purposes of the lawyer a more definite conception is required. The sovereign authority is to him the person, or body, to whose directions the law attributes legal force, the person in whom resides as of right the ultimate power of laying down general rules or of issuing isolated rules or commands, whose authority is that of the law itself—see James Bryce, *Studies in History and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 2.51–2.
15. See *Law from Anarchy to Utopia*, part 2.
16. Hart suggests that: 'Most educated people have the idea that the laws in England form some sort of system and that in France or the United States or Soviet Russia and, indeed, in almost every part of the world which is thought of as a separate "country" there are legal systems which are broadly similar in structure in spite of important differences. Indeed an education would have seriously failed if it left people in ignorance of these facts, and we would hardly think it a mark of great sophistication if those who knew this could also say what are the

important points of similarity between different legal systems. Any educated man might be expected to be able to identify these salient features in some such skeleton way as follows. They comprise (i) rules forbidding or enjoining certain types of behaviour under penalty; (ii) rules requiring people to compensate those whom they injure in certain ways; (iii) rules specifying what must be done to make wills, contracts or other arrangements which confer rights and create obligations; (iv) courts to determine what the rules are and when they have been broken, and to fix the punishment or compensation to be paid; (v) a legislature to make new rules and abolish old ones'—*The Concept of Law*, 3.

17. Llyod suggests that this is sometimes contrasted with justice according to law, as when Aristotle treats it as a corrective to legal justice—see Michael D A Freeman, *Llyod's Introduction to Jurisprudence* (London: Sweet and Maxwell, 2001), 523.

(Continued from page 82)

The biggest difference between the Ramakrishna movement and other monastic and non-monastic organizations belonging to different denominations is that these are centres for an intense life of sacrifice and work, not just to sing a few bhajans, take prasad, and then go home. It is not a comfortable religion that Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji came to preach, but a life dedicated to higher values, in which renunciation and self-abnegation play a predominant role. Therefore, those that come to this fold must be encouraged, for they have been blessed by the manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna's power to help spread his *bhava*. 

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
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The Glory of Karma

B P Singhal

Ocean Books, 4/19 Asaf Ali Road,
New Delhi 110 002. Website: www.oceanbooks.co.in. 2011. 143 pp. ₹ 200.

‘Our best work is done, our great influence is exerted, when we are without the thought of self,’ said Swami Vivekananda. In this way Swamiji reveals how labour can be motivated to achieve highest productivity. Work should ideally be treated as worship.

In his book B P Singhal explains the need for transforming ‘work into an energy generating function instead of an energy expending function’. Further, perfect harmony will prevail worldwide if people played their role being their own masters, without the need of being supervised; they will thus achieve *purnata*, masterhood. The force of *nishkama*, unselfish, karma constitutes the essential ingredient for *purnata*. How do people reach that ideal state? The ‘mechanics and methodology’, as the book’s blurb notes, form the focus of *The Glory of Karma*. Its fifteen chapters are ‘an action manual’.

The discussion centres on concepts like self-discipline, the technique of overcoming fatigue, the mischiefs of the ego, and ethical conduct. The cause-and-effect theory has been discussed in great detail. The accumulation of *samskaras* through thought and deed is scientifically explained—the theory of karma is the most rational answer to all events in life, luck and ill luck being misconceived ideas.

A chapter titled ‘The Magical Single Intention’ is an elaborate discussion on how people of various walks of life perform when they are under observation through cameras, with one group aware of the cameras and the other not. However, some of its conclusions concerning human nature are

too well known, like wealth without ethics—a visionary had warned about a state of ‘dinner without appetite and appetite without dinner’.

The author cites examples to show the way one should work. German nationals are passionate about work; they consider work as their duty to the nation. The author also presents the story of an English workman who went out of his way to help the employer by using spare time instead of being idle. Long ago Swami Vivekananda drew our attention to this laudable work culture in Japan and Western nations. We also have in our Indian midst, though in a minority, people who measure up to those standards.

The fourth chapter, ‘First Occult Aspect of Karma’, refers to yogis’ powers. It should be read with caution, particularly by the young generation, as it needs to be understood in the right perspective.

B P Singhal, who served as a high ranking police officer, has shared his views in understanding the purpose of life. His book is expected to promote a healthy work culture.

P S Sundaram
Chennai



India's Gift to the World Is the Light Spiritual

Swami Jyotirmayananda

Swami Jyotirmayananda, 185 Anna
Salai, Chennai 600 002. Website:
www.vivekanandagospel.org. 2010.
344 pp. ₹ 250.

This book is a compilation of a few papers presented by the author in conferences on Hinduism held in the US. The papers present different aspects of Hindu culture and spirituality as well as their relevance and problems in the modern world, which are supplemented by the views of

eminent persons. The author joined the Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari, in 1973 and took to monastic life independently in 1976.

The title of this book is derived from a quote of Swami Vivekananda. I wonder though if Swamiji would approve of the frequent bashing of the Abrahamic faiths that the author and his colleagues indulge in in their zeal to promote Hinduism and Hindutva. This makes the book quite difficult to read. For instance: 'Churches and mosques do not have any deeper significance than mere halls for mass prayer. On the other hand temples are vibrant centers of Divine energy' (214 and 243). There is a passage by the author of this book to which many leading historians would strongly object: 'The British had stealthily entered our Motherland by the backdoor, as it were, overpowering the centuries-old "crude", nay, diabolic Islamic rulers who had played havoc in the country, excelling in wanton desecration and vandalism of our temples and other holy places' (99). To call the Islamic rulers 'crude' and 'diabolic' is extreme.

The author quotes some nice passages from Arnold Toynbee, Mark Twain, Will Durant, Albert Einstein, A L Basham, and others to highlight India's greatness. The best part of this book, for me, is an article by Swami Abhedananda titled 'Influence of India on Western Civilization', which was first published in *Vedanta Kesari* in 1920-1 and reproduced recently in the same journal.

The book's proofreading is not the best. Also, some passages are repeated, which makes for a dull reading.

Nileen Putatunda
A devotee from Kolkata

After the little known life and times of the ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, Dolavira, and other settlements called the Indus Valley, and also after the second stage of urbanization in India called the Ganga Urbanization, there has been a period of about a thousand years of historical darkness. Did the same people that, following a probable desiccation of the environment around the Indus, migrated towards the Ganga? If so, why did it take them a thousand years to travel down and why did they not build cities and dwellings like they did in their original homeland? These questions that have been troubling historians, anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, philosophers, and others are growing in importance for the national consciousness. There has been less than adequate interest and funds and expertise to bring all the branches of studies to unravel the mystery. A few mounds carefully dug out have thrown new light about this period. But unfortunately these findings have not made their way into the history textbooks of schools and colleges. The one reason being that there has to be more evidence, more extensive excavations, as well as agreement between the different branches of sciences.

This is a fascinating period and many scholars are veering towards its study. One of the best ways is by studying the history of the Ganga Urbanization, which is also in danger of being lost, and then travel backwards in historical time to do some more excavations. It is certain that cities—big and small, fortified or opened—ports, huge roads, and other signs of urbanization were thriving during Buddha's time. There is a large Buddhist literature that speaks of different urban and rural areas, classifying them according to population and the skilled and semiskilled work done in them. It was a flourishing period, people were energetic and produced great wealth. The author, eminently competent and having many books to his credit, has gone through the Pali Vinaya and Sutta records painstakingly and has excavated a treasure of details. The existence of many urban centres mentioned by Sarao have been corroborated by recent excavations.

We are in a thrilling period of discoveries, and this is the right book at the right time.

PB



Urban Centres and Urbanisation: As Reflected in the Pāli Vinaya and Sutta Piṭakas

K T S Sarao

Munshiram Manoharlal, PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi 110 055. Website: www.mrmlbooks.com. 2010. xxvi + 256 pp. ₹ 395.

REPORTS



Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

The following centres celebrated the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. **Allahabad:** a week-long celebration from 5 to 11 November 2011 with symposiums and cultural programmes; **Chandigarh:** quiz competitions on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in 13 schools of Pinjore and Kalka, Haryana, in which 950 students participated, and a public meeting and a spiritual retreat in Chandigarh ashrama in the month of November; **Chennai Mission Ashrama:** teachers' convention on 12 November, in which 170 teachers participated; **Jamshedpur:** spiritual retreat on 23 October, in which 275 devotees took part; **Kadapa:** public meeting, devotional music, and release of a Telugu version of the Bengali film *Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna* on 6 November, and spiritual retreat from 5 to 7 November, in which 60 devotees participated; **Moscow** (Russia): public meeting at the Indian Embassy in Moscow on 3 November, which was presided by Sri Ajai Malhotra, Indian Ambassador to Russia, and addressed by Padmashri Dr B Rybakov and others; **Ramharipur:** devotees' convention at Durgapur city on 6 November, in which about 2,500 devotees participated; **Sikra-Kulingram:** devotees' convention on 20 November, in which about 400 devotees took part.

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres celebrated the 150th birth



Sri Ajai Malhotra presiding at the meeting in the Indian Embassy in Moscow; left: Swami Jyotirupananda kindling the ceremonial lamp

anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Belgaum** held cultural competitions, in which about 1,200 students participated. The ashrama also conducted quiz competitions, through its sub-centre, on the life and teachings of Swamiji from August to November, in which about 1,900 students took part. **Chandigarh** organized lectures on the life and teachings of Swamiji and distributed books on him at a school and a college in Amritsar on 29 November. **Chennai Math** launched a state-of-the-art multimedia gallery called 'Experience Vivekananda' at Vivekanandar Illam (Vivekananda House). **Delhi** held the last round of its all-India online competition for school students on 19 and 20 November, in which 34 students from different parts of the country participated. **Durban** (South Africa) built an educational and skills development centre for a high school at Kwa Mashu and handed it over to the authorities of the school on 20 October. **Kadapa** organized a workshop on personality development on 20 August, in which 550 college students participated, and a residential workshop on value education from 9 to 11 September, in which 86 teachers took part. **Nagpur** has taken up the project 'Swami Vivekananda Swadhyayamala', under which about 50,000 students of 440 schools, who were supplied with books on Swamiji, have been asked to answer some questions on his life. Under its Vivekananda value inculcation programme, **Port Blair** further covered

5,000 students from 10 institutions in Port Blair after July 2011. **Ranchi Morabadi** organized cultural competitions at the district level in the month of October, in which about 4,000 students participated; thereafter, state level competitions were held at the ashrama on 25 and 26 November, in which 215 students took part.

News from Branch Centres

Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly constructed extension to the dispensary building at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Bankura**, on 7 November.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly built second floor of the international guest house at **Belur Math** on 9 November, the birthday of Swami Vijnanananda.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, conducted a four-day sports meet from 9 to 12 November, in which 1,850 students from 43 schools participated. Sri Kedar Kashyap, minister for tribal development, Government of Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the meet. Besides, the centre organized the concluding phase of its silver jubilee celebration from 25 to 27 November. Sri Shekhar

Dutt, governor of Chhattisgarh, inaugurated the function and released a commemorative volume. Dr Raman Singh, chief minister of Chhattisgarh, and several other distinguished persons addressed the various meetings held on this occasion. On 27 November the newly built extension to the girls' hostel building of the centre was inaugurated.

Achievements

Rupak Kumar Thakur, a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia**, who secured the third position in the Delhi-based International Mathematics Olympiad Test, has received the prestigious 'Bihar Gaurav Award' from the chief minister of Bihar. The award comprises a citation and a sum of 50,000 rupees.

Relief

Earthquake Relief • In the wake of the devastating earthquake on 18 September 2011, hundreds of people lost their lives while many suffered the loss of property in Sikkim, West Bengal, and other surrounding states. **Saradapitha** centre distributed the following items among 122 affected families in 6 villages of Kurseong, Kalimpong, Debagram Fulbari, and Siliguri areas in West Bengal from 22 September to 11 October: 1,470 kg rice, 294 kg dal, 162 kg sugar, 40 kg mustard oil, 1.5 kg milk powder, 50 packets of biscuits, and 720 one-litre water bottles.

Sports meet at Narainpur



Sports meet at Narainpur



Flood Relief • Continuing its flood relief operations, **Sikra Kulingram** centre further distributed 250 kg chira, 1,450 saris, 200 dhotis, 1,250 lungis, 1,250 blankets, 125 kg bleaching powder, and 1,100 kg lime among the victims in Charchat, Gobardanga, and Saguna blocks of North 24-Parganas district; **Saradapitha** centre distributed 1,000 blankets to flood-affected people of Amta-II and Bagnan blocks in Howrah district; **Lucknow** centre distributed clothing to 221 children in the flood-affected areas near Ayodhya in the month of October.

Fire Relief • **Sarisha** centre distributed 8 saris, 8 dhotis, 9 uttaris, 5 mosquito nets, 19 towels, 8 mats, 8 blankets, and 8 plastic sheets to 5 families whose houses had been gutted by fire in Chakmanik village of South 24-Parganas district; **Saradapitha** centre handed over 30 sets of school benches, 5 sets of chairs and tables, 10 fans, and 1 computer to a school at Banipur in Howrah district that had been destroyed by fire; **Puri Mission** centre served cooked food (rice and dalma) for 5 days and distributed the following items to 11 families whose houses had been destroyed by fire in Old Sadar Thana Road and Kacheri Road areas in Puri Town: 11 blankets, 12 saris, 15 dhotis, 11 towels, 11 mosquito nets, 15 sets of garments, 11 mats, and 11 sets of utensils (each set containing 1 bucket, 1 degchi, 1 kadai, 1 ladle, 2 plates, 2 bowls, 2 spoons, and 2 tumblers).

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Belgharia**: 1,006 saris, 709 dhotis, 221 lungis, 805 shirts, 805 pants, 969 frocks, 158 sets of shalwar and kameez, 20 woollen garments, 36 water bottles, 51 kg chira, 20 kg chhatu, 10 kg biscuits, and 763 kg soap; **Cooch Behar**: 371 saris, 37 dhotis, and 4 lungis; **Jalpaiguri**: 500 saris; **Limbdi**: food items to 704 poor families.

Winter Relief • 311 blankets were distributed through the following centres to needy people: **Cooch Behar**: 270; **Khetri**: 41.

Free Child Eye Care Programmes and Eye Camps

During 2011 child eye care programmes were conducted by **Chandigarh**, **Chapra**, **Jamshedpur**,

Khetri, **Lucknow**, **Rajkot**, and **Salem** centres. A total of 36,434 children were checked and provided with vitamins, and glasses were given to 2,732 children with eyesight problems.

Free eye camps are regularly conducted by many centres of the Ramakrishna Mission. A cumulative report is given in the table below, covering the period from 1 December 2010 to 30 November 2011.

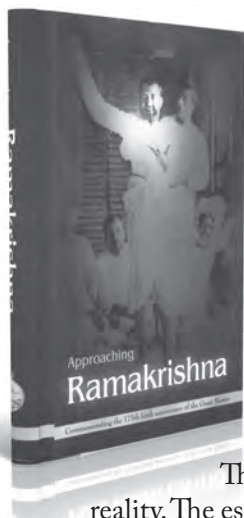


Centre	Patients Treated	Surgeries Performed
Belgaum ¹	2,091	478
Chandigarh	310	35
Chengalpattu	763	91
Garbeta	2,108	253
Ghatshila ²	57	30
Jamshedpur ¹	419	243
Kamarpukur	250	166
Khetri ^{1 2}	2,411	660
Kanpur	45	3
Limbdi	257	48
Lucknow	14,491	1,902
Madurai	125	0
Mayavati	367	96
Medinipur	427	86
Nagpur	361	51
Narainpur	218	171
Porbandar ³	707	134
Rajkot ¹	6,249	649
Ranchi Sanatorium ³	229	60
Salem	4,266	94
Silchar ¹	2,069	563
Ulsoor	2,998	1,391
Vadodara	509	61
Varanasi HOS	172	150
Visakhapatnam	110	47
Total	42,009	7,462

¹ Includes data for November 2010

² Includes data for October 2010

³ Includes data for September 2010



Approaching Ramakrishna

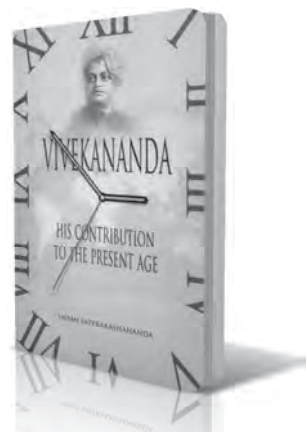
Sri Ramakrishna's heart is like an ocean in which the universe floats like an island. Awed by the infinite expanse around us, we in the universe constantly try to fathom this personality—each one of us in his or her own way. But each person's perception is unique, as is the knowledge we obtain thereby.

This book is one such humble attempt to comprehend this supreme reality. The essays contained here were originally published in the January 2011 issue of the English journal *Prabuddha Bharata*.

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Vivekananda His Contribution to the Present Age by Swami Satprakashananda

Swami Vivekananda is a name which brings to us the images of a saint, a prophet, a reformer, a humanist, and much more. Translating the teachings of his master Sri Ramakrishna, into philosophy and precept, the Swami shifted the focus of religion from celestial beings to human beings. The true significance of his work is brought home to us only when we see his work on the larger timeline of the religio-philosophical history of the world. This is precisely what Swami Satprakashananda does in this volume and thus effectively delineates the contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the present age.




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by Swami Premeshananda

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